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Matilda
Lonsdale.

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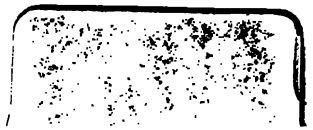

Front. Matilda and Rupert visiting Ann Rushton.—P. 25.

MATILDA LONSDALE;

OR,

THE ELDEST SISTER.

BY

CHARLOTTE ADAMS,

AUTHOR OF "BOYS AT HOME," "EDGAR CLIFTON," ETC.

Illustrated by Birket Foster.

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MATILDA LONSDALE.

CHAPTER I.

The Sisters. Retrospection. Practising Music. Mr. Lonsdale. A Task imposed. Disappointment. Respect to Parents. A Little Messenger. Dinner forgotten. A Visit of Inquiry. Gentle Manners. Sweetness of Temper. The late Mrs. Lonsdale. Self-examination.

"ELEVEN o'clock!" exclaimed Juliet Lonsdale, as her elder sister, Matilda, entered the sitting-room, where she was impatiently waited for, "and we have not yet tried over one of the duets we are to play at Mrs. Stanley's this evening."

"I am sorry," replied Matilda, "that I could not come before, but I have been very busy; I always have more than usual to do on Monday mornings. But now we will not lose any more time;" and seating herself beside her sister at the pianoforte, she continued, "what piece or pieces have you looked out?"

"This one of Döhler's," replied Juliet, "and this of Beethoven's, and this arrangement from Guillaume Tell, and this from the Puritani, and Rossini's favourite airs, and Balfe's—"

"Stay, stay, dear Juliet," interrupted Matilda; "if we play one-half of what you have selected, we shall tire the company, and keep all others from the instrument; besides, I think a vocal duet would make a little variety."

"Oh! I have selected plenty of them besides," said Juliet, "and two or three of Mrs. Stanley's favourite songs for us to sing. Look! here they are;" and she

placed before her sister a somewhat large collection of vocal music, from which Matilda chose one duet, and then turning to the instrumental pieces, she took one from among them, saying,—

"These will be enough, I think."

"Enough!" repeated Juliet; "enough to take to Mrs. Stanley's? Do you not remember she is always asking us to play, more than she does any of the other girls; more even than she does Louisa Harvey, and she is now in London."

"But Rose Vernon will be there, and Harriet Lucas, and they both—"

"Oh, do not mention Harriet Lucas's music," interrupted Juliet. "Mrs. Stanley, I know, cannot bear her playing; she dashes away right or wrong, and without the least expression."

"But then, Rose—" interposed Matilda.

"Does not play half so well as you do," eagerly exclaimed Juliet, "nor, to say the truth, so well as I do."

Matilda gently shook her head. "You think me conceited, I fear," said Juliet, "but I am not, indeed. Perhaps," continued she, fondly throwing her arm round Matilda, "I am vain of my sister's play."

"You are too partial in your judgment of me, dear Juliet, I fear," said Matilda, returning her sister's caress; "and we ought always to be ready to see merit in others."

"So I am," replied Juliet, "and I allow that Rose Vernon has nice execution, and a good deal of taste; but I am quite right in saying she does not play near so well as you, although she is a year older. She was fifteen last Christmas, and you were only fourteen."

"We have had greater advantages," said Matilda, "and it would be wrong if we had not profited by them. Dearest mamma used to take such pains with our music, and—"

Matilda's voice faltered, and Juliet continued, "and in her last illness begged us to keep it up."

"And we have done as she desired," resumed Matilda; "though it was a painful effort to begin again after we had lost our instructor, and the tenderest and best of mothers."

The eyes of both girls filled with tears as they recalled the recollection of their excellent mother, whom they had lost above half a year ago, and they sat beside the pianoforte wholly unmindful of the purpose for which they were there, till their brother, a boy of seven years old, who with a younger sister was in the room, came up to them, and making some childlike attempts at consolation, repeated the words that he had often heard used by his sisters themselves.

"Do not cry," said he; "mamma is far happier than if she was here; she is in Heaven, you know. Do not cry; if you do, I shall cry too, and so will Kate," added he, turning to a little girl of five years of age, who, laying aside her doll, began to look very piteous.

"Poor little children!" said Matilda, "you scarcely know how great is your loss, as well as Juliet's and mine; but we must endeavour to bear up against it; for, as our dear mamma herself said, it is the will of God that she should be taken from us."

"You will be good children, will you not?" said Juliet, "and do as Matilda bids you, and that will make her happy."

"I will," said the boy, earnestly.

"And I will be a very good child too," said Kate.

"Go then, dear Rupert,"—that was the boy's name —"and learn your lesson well," said Matilda; "and you, little Kate, be as quiet as you can, and Juliet and I will begin to play."

The turn the conversation had taken appeared to have removed all Juliet's desire to perform much in the evening; for she was perfectly contented to confine her practice to the pieces Matilda had selected, and went patiently over and over them again, in order to render them as grateful to the ear as it was in their power to make them. By degrees the

girls got interested in their occupation, their spirits revived, and they were singing with animation, and enjoyment of the beautiful music, a duet of Rossini's, when the door of the room was noisily thrown open, and Mr. Lonsdale, the father of the young ladies, entered. His countenance wore an angry aspect, and hastening up to his daughters, peremptorily ordered them to leave off playing and attend to him.

"What is the meaning of this?" said he, "that I am so neglected, no attention paid to my orders, and nothing done for me? I went up stairs to dress in haste to go out, and there I find all the things just as they came from the laundress: nothing looked over and got ready for me to wear."

"Indeed, papa," said Matilda, "I have been at work for you this morning, and you will find everything you want to wear to-day placed in the drawer in your room, quite ready for you."

"And what is the reason that nothing else is mended? There lies my linen in a heap on the table, not a button put on, or a collar mended, and no stockings fit to wear, and my neck-ties all in rags. What do you mean by this, I say? Sitting there making that noise, and letting your father get on as he can without help?"

"I assure you, papa," again began Matilda; but Mr. Lonsdale, unheeding her, ordered her and her sister to follow him up stairs, where the girls beheld the room strewed with the recent labours of the laundress; their father having impatiently unfolded and turned over all the different articles, without a due inspection of their state, which having been carefully cared for by his daughters the preceding week, were certainly not in the condition he represented them to be.

Matilda paused in surprise; but in a moment or two she opened a drawer and said gently,—

"Here are the things I have got ready for you, papa, and we shall mend the remainder to-morrow;

but this morning we want to practise some music to play at Mrs. Stanley's, as she has invited us to meet a few young friends at her house this evening."

"The things shall be done to-day," said Mr. Lonsdale, and gathering up his linen, he thrust it, heedless of crushing and tumbling, into Matilda's arms, and ordering her and her sister out of the room, bid them not stir till everything was mended and put in its place.

"Are we not to go this evening?" inquired Juliet, timidly.

"No," said Mr. Lonsdale; and he shut to his door with a bang; and his daughters, with heavy hearts, descended with their work into the sitting-room.

For some time the girls worked on in silence, broken only now and then by a few words uttered in an undertone, respecting their occupation, or in a heavy sigh or two that occasionally escaped them; but when the sharp closing of the street door and an exclamation from Kate informed them that "papa was gone out," they raised their drooping heads, and looking at each other, began to speak freely of what had just occurred.

"Who could have thought," said Juliet, "that papa would not have been satisfied with having one set of things ready for him? I wish I had come up stairs and helped you. I ought to have done so, but my mind was so full of the evening's amusement, and practising my part of the duets, that I quite forgot how you were employed."

"I wish," said Matilda, "I had told papa that I had laid all he would want to-day in a drawer ready for him, but—"

Matilda paused, and Juliet continued, "but he had been so angry with us in the morning, you did not like to go to him."

"Poor papa!" said Matilda; "I am sure he is very unhappy."

"Is he not wonderfully changed?" said Juliet.

"When dear mamma was alive he never scolded us; on the contrary, he seemed as though he loved us very much."

"Yes, he is changed," replied Matilda; "everything is changed since mamma's death;" and no longer able to command herself, tears, which she had been struggling hard to suppress, burst forth, and she wept unrestrainedly for some time, Juliet bearing her company in her sorrow.

At length Matilda, making a strong effort over herself, dried her tears, and resumed her work, saying,—

"These things will never be done if we go on so. I should like to get everything mended and put in its place to-day, if it was possible; but I fear it is more than we can accomplish."

"Papa has rumpled his linen so; it is not fit to be seen," said Juliet.

"It must be smoothed again," replied her sister.

"Well, Harriet, the servant can do that," said Juliet.

"Perhaps she can," said Matilda, "if I stand by; but I must not trust her by herself."

"No," answered Juliet; "she would use irons covered with black, and make everything worse than it was before; she is so stupid; she occasions you a great deal of trouble; I wish she was gone, and we had another servant in her place."

"She is young, and will improve, I hope," said Matilda; "it would be a sad thing to send her home just now, her mother being ill, and her father out of work. The poor man called here a few days ago, and begged his daughter to strive to do her best, that she might keep her place."

"You have to look after her in everything," observed Juliet, "and yet how often papa finds fault with all that is done. You have a very unpleasant life, I think, dear."

"I should not mind anything I do, or any trouble I

take," said Matilda, earnestly, "if I could only please papa."

"He used to call you his good, clever girl," said Juliet; and," continued she, mournfully, "he never notices me now as he did formerly, or say I am his own Juliet; and the poor little children, whom he used to love and caress so tenderly, are quite frightened at him, and run out of his way whenever they can."

"Hush!" said Matilda, in an undertone; "do not let the children hear you. Look at them, poor little souls, how sorrowful they look, sitting yonder trying to learn their lessons, while we are talking. I have no doubt they have heard all we have been saying. We must mind what we say before them, or we shall make their little lives unhappy."

"I am sure we are unhappy enough," said Juliet, sighing heavily.

"We might be much worse off than we are," replied Matilda, endeavouring to assume an air of composure; "and if we are patient, and strive to do our duty, I dare say we shall be happy again."

"But whatever we do," said Juliet, suspending her work, and looking steadily at her sister, "we cannot have dear mamma back; and everything has gone wrong since her death."

"What you say is very true," replied Matilda; "mamma can never return to us; but we can strive to do what she wished, and endeavour to find satisfaction in that."

"Oh! that she had not died!" exclaimed Juliet, and bending down her head, she hid her face in the pile of work that lay before her, while bitter tears burst forth anew.

"Juliet, dear," said Matilda, in a voice tremulous with emotion, "try to bear up against this affliction. It is a trial God has been pleased to send us, and we must not murmur at his will."

The words of her elder sister always carried weight with them in Juliet's mind, and in a few moments she raised her head and resumed her work, pursuing it diligently for some time in silence.

But Juliet's was a more excitable nature than Matilda's, and she had not yet learned the self-command which her sister had acquired, and she again broke forth in complaint."

"Papa," said she, "is always finding fault with me for being thoughtless, and constantly calling me giddy."

"It is a parent's duty," said Matilda, "to tell children of their faults; do you not think so?"

"I do not think," replied Juliet, "that I am so very thoughtless and giddy; I am sure I have enough to make me otherwise; and at any rate, papa need not speak to me so angrily when I do what he does not approve of."

Matilda made no answer, for she was very busy looking for a wristband button, that she thought had fallen on the floor.

"Here is a button," said Juliet, taking one from her workbox and handing it to her sister; "and then," continued she, "to think of papa's not allowing us to go to Mrs. Stanley's this evening. I had been thinking of this visit with pleasure for several days. It is a great disappointment to us; and how odd it will appear to that lady our not going."

"We must write a note to her, and say we cannot come," said Matilda.

"And what reason will you give?" inquired Juliet.

Matilda considered for a minute, and then replied, "We had better say that papa could not spare us."

"That will never do," said Juliet, "for I am sure Mrs. Stanley knows well enough that papa does not set such value on our company as not to be able to spare us for one evening;" and a rather comical smile lit up the girl's sorrowful countenance.

Her sister did not see the smile, for she was working away as hard as she could, in the hope of accomplishing before night the task her father had assigned her.

"You must think of something better to say," continued Juliet.

"The only thing I can think of," replied Matilda, "if you do not approve of what I first proposed, is to say to Mrs. Stanley that before papa went out this morning he gave us an employment which we cannot get finished in time to have the pleasure of being at her house this evening."

"That must do, I suppose," said Juliet, "for want of anything better; but I have little doubt that Mrs. Stanley will surmise that there has been something unpleasant between papa and us."

"I should be very sorry for that," said Matilda; "it would be very disagreeable to have it get abroad that, since Mrs. Lonsdale's death, Mr. Lonsdale and his daughters live unhappily together. I always try that no one should find out anything about 'family matters,' as our poor old friend, Mrs. Rushton, terms disagreements between relatives."

"And I am sure I am very careful, too," said Juliet; and the other day, when I had been crying, and Miss Pringle asked me if papa was displeased with me, I would not answer, and in a minute spoke of something else."

"Miss Pringle!" repeated Matilda gravely; "it is best to be cautious what we say to her."

"But she was very kind in her manner," said Juliet, "very kind indeed; and I am sure that if I had only let her think papa had been angry with me, she would have pitied me; and, I have no doubt, when she had heard how it was that I had incurred his displeasure, she would have taken my part."

"You would not, surely," said Matilda, looking up in surprise at her sister, "even for a moment, have thought of a comparative stranger taking your part against papa."

"*I* should not have taken part against him;" returned Juliet quickly.

"I think you would;" replied her sister.

"How?" asked Juliet.

"It appears to me," replied Matilda, "that the merely allowing any one to pity you when papa has been displeased with you implies, even without words, that he is wrong, and you right."

"I cannot reason as you do," said Juliet; "you are quite a logician, as Mr. Stanley calls you."

"Oh, he was only laughing and joking with me the other day, and saying things he did not mean, merely to hear how I would answer him. We are neither of us logicians, dear Juliet, but we have reasoning powers enough to know that it is best to confine to ourselves all that is unpleasant in our family; and we can recall to mind what our dear mamma often said, that 'a parent's faults should be sacred in a child's eye.'"

"Yes," replied Juliet, "but dear mamma little thought how changed papa would one day be to us."

"She was not thinking of any particular case at the time," replied Matilda; "but, you remember, she said this ought to be a principle in a child's mind. But I will go now, and write the note to Mrs. Stanley."

"And mind you say," cried Juliet, "how very sorry we are not to be able to spend the evening with her."

The note being duly written by Matilda, a difficulty arose as to the means of sending it; Harriet, the maid, could not possibly be spared, for Mr. Lonsdale might return at any minute and require her services. There was no little boy or girl that could be readily summoned to be the bearer, and neither of the sisters could venture out, occupied as they were t the present time, to seek for a messenger.

While debating the matter, Rupert came up to his

sisters, and begged to be allowed to carry the note, and also that Kate might accompany him.

Here was a little messenger at once; but was it safe to trust one so young on the road by himself? Matilda weighed the matter in her own mind.

Her brother was a tractable boy, and accustomed to obey orders. Beachwoods, the residence of Mrs. Stanley, was not more than half a mile off, and stood a very little way from the high road; besides all which, Rupert had been there so often with his sisters, that, as he said, he could almost have found his way blindfold. Such being the case, after strictly charging Rupert not to stop by the way, and not to deviate from the direct road, not to speak to any strangers, and, above all, to take care of Kate, his elder sister allowed the children to go on their errand.

As soon as they were gone, Matilda said it would be necessary to see what preparations the servant was making for dinner; and leaving Juliet still at work, she proceeded to an examination of the contents of the larder and cupboards. The inspection was far from satisfactory; for, with the exception of rather a scanty supply of bread, there was nothing to eat. Matilda exclaimed in surprise; and asked Harriet if Juliet had not brought her any orders from her papa, to go to the shops and purchase what was necessary for the consumption of the family.

The servant replied that she had received no orders, and Matilda returned to inquire of her sister how so singular an omission had occurred; and she learned with regret that Juliet had quite forgotten what she had engaged to do.

It was Matilda's province every morning, after breakfast, to see what would be wanted, and to inform her father, and ask for the money necessary to make the requisite purchases; but on the present day, Juliet, who was very anxious for her sister to sing and play with her, offered, in order to save Matilda's time, to perform this office. Now it so happened that Mr.

Lonsdale had been in a more than usually uncomfortable state of mind, and every one who approached him felt the effects of his irritable temper; and Juliet delayed from time to time what she had to do, hoping that a more favourable moment might arrive for her to tell the wants of the family, and ask for money to supply them.

But the moment never seemed to come; and at last, occupying herself with other matters, she at last quite forgot the demand it was necessary to make.

Asking their father for money at any time was never very pleasant to the girls, for he seldom seemed very willing to give it; and Matilda, in her frugal housekeeping, had frequently to bear reproaches of waste, bad management, and even extravagance.

Juliet expressed herself very sorry for her forgetfulness, and regretted the consequences of it; but by far the worst part of the business was, the dread of her father's displeasure when he should return and find no dinner prepared for him. After sitting meditating over her work for some time, fearing every instant to hear her father's step in the hall, she asked her sister if Harriet could not be sent out to procure what might be sufficient for Mr. Lonsdale's repast: for themselves, she knew they could dine on bread, as they had often done before.

But Matilda reminded her sister of the strict injunction Mr. Lonsdale had given, never to send out to buy even the smallest article without having the money to pay for it.

Juliet assented to what her sister said, and then silently pursued her work, ever and anon starting as some noise made her think that her father was come home.

In the mean time Matilda was not without her share of anxiety, fearing that she had done wrong in trusting the children out so far alone, and that Mr. Lonsdale would on his return blame her for having sent

them with the note to Mrs. Stanley's; but from these apprehensions she was in due time relieved by the appearance of the two little ones, Kate, laughing and happy, with a bunch of early primroses in her hand, and Rupert, proud and pleased with his walk, and the consciousness of having not only been trusted himself, but of having had the charge of his little sister.

Two young ladies of the name of Graham, who had encountered Rupert and Kate in their walk, entered the house with them, calling, as they stated, for the purpose of expressing their surprise that Matilda and Juliet were not going to Mrs. Stanley's party, and to inquire the reason.

Louisa Graham, the younger of the two visitors, was a great friend of Juliet's, and was sorry to find that she was not to be at Mrs. Stanley's in the evening. She had questioned Rupert very closely on the way, "why his sisters were not going?" but she had learned nothing from the little boy beyond his answer of,—

"Papa says my sisters are to stay at home."

The good counsel that Matilda had given Juliet, respecting a parent's failings, had been attended to by Rupert, and, child as he was, he had been struck with it, and acted upon it.

After lamenting that she should not meet her friends, Louisa told Juliet and Matilda that they would have a great loss, as the party was expected to be a more than usually pleasant one. Two or three young ladies, she said, were coming from London, who had been instructed by first-rate masters in various accomplishments; that an excellent professional singer was to be there, besides a lady and gentlemen who were just returned from Italy, who were to bring a portfolio of beautiful sketches.

Juliet listened to these details with a flushed countenance and restless manner, while Matilda, with less outward emotion, experienced a keen sense of disap-

pointment, especially at the idea of losing the sight of the drawings, which had already been much talked of in the neighbourhood.

After a time the two young ladies took their leave, and the day wore wearily on with the sisters. Juliet, in the fulness of her disappointment, absolutely forgetting the dreaded return of her father, till long after the usual dinner-hour was passed.

"At any rate," said Matilda, as she pursued her occupation by candle-light, "we are very happy not to have had papa come home and find no dinner ready for him."

"I cannot find happiness in anything," said Juliet; "I am so sorry not to be at Mrs. Stanley's. I was very sorry before, but I am ten times more so since Louisa Graham has told us how delightful the party is to be."

"It is a great disappointment, certainly," replied Matilda, "but we must try and not mind it. And do you not think we had better have tea ready for papa against he comes in? He has been out a long while, and I dare say will want to take some refreshment on his return."

So saying, Matilda rang for the maid to bring in the tea, and stirring up the fire and putting on fresh coals, she swept the hearth, put away all litters, and strove to give the room as cheerful an appearance as she could, determining to welcome her father as kindly as if he had not debarred her from a great pleasure. She next examined the state of the tea-chest, and finding there would be barely tea enough for her father, she helped herself and Juliet to some milk and water, and gave the younger children their supper.

All appearance of the evening meal, with the exception of the tea-tray for Mr. Lonsdale, was then carefully removed, and the elder girls resumed their work, while Rupert and Kate, with hair neatly brushed, and fresh-washed hands and faces, sat at the table quiet

and orderly, looking over a book of prints. The party were thus employed when Mr. Lonsdale returned home. Matilda went forward to welcome him, and all the other children spoke; but he passed on to his seat, and fixing his eyes gloomily on the fire, remained some time without noticing any of his children, except replying to his eldest daughter's inquiry respecting tea, that he did not want any.

Matilda sent away the kettle and the tray, and then, after one or two timid attempts to engage her father in conversation, she abandoned the hope of inducing him to talk to her, and pursued her work in silence. The task that had been imposed on herself and sister was still unfinished; for, either from Mr. Lonsdale's rough way of handling them, or from the material being much worn, several of the neck-ties had long rents in them, which required tedious and careful repair.

At length, rousing from his self-imposed silence, and apparently annoyed at the chill his presence had cast over the juvenile party, he exclaimed,—

"How dull you all are! Have you nothing to say to me after my having been out all day? Do you hear me, Matilda? What do you keep on that incessant stitching for? Why do you not play and sing to me?"

A reply rose to Matilda's lips, "that she was engaged upon the work which in the morning her father had bid her not leave till it was finished;" but she checked it, and with great sweetness of temper she rose, and sitting down to the pianoforte, played and sung some of her prettiest songs.

"I wish you would let me hear something worth listening to," said Mr. Lonsdale, impatiently stopping his daughter in the middle of a charming air. "Why do you not sing me some of the music from 'Lucia?'"

"You know, papa," said Juliet, eagerly, "that you bid Matilda never sing anything to you from that opera."

"I know," repeated Mr. Lonsdale, in a tone of irritation; "you are very fond of telling me 'I know,' Miss Juliet; you are very pert, and *you* may know that," and, snatching up a candle, he abruptly quitted the room.

"I am sure," said Juliet, after a few moments' silence, "I did not mean to say anything to offend papa."

"That opera," replied Matilda, "was poor mamma's favourite, and the music no doubt awakens painful feelings in papa. You remember how he used to delight in hearing her sing from it."

"Still he asked for it to-night," said Juliet, "and he paid no attention to what you sang. He did not seem the least pleased, though you sang very sweetly, and were so very obliging."

Matilda turned her head aside to hide the gathering tears, and closing the pianoforte, she led away the children to put them to bed. Juliet in the mean time completed the little that remained to be done of the work, and having put it all in the proper drawers in her father's room, she sat down to endeavour to divert her thoughts with a book, but her sister, on her return, found her weeping bitterly.

Matilda did her best to console and comfort the poor girl, and finally persuaded her to go off to bed, saying, that if her papa found her crying so, he might be more angry.

Juliet did as she was advised, Matilda promising to follow as soon as she had ascertained if she should be wanted any more that night. Matilda, like her sister, tried to read, but she was too anxiously watching the movements of her father to be able to fix her attention steadily on her book, and it was a great relief when Harriet came to tell her, "that her master had gone up to his room, and that he desired that every one would immediately retire for the night."

Matilda found that poor Juliet had fallen asleep,

and she moved cautiously about the room, fearing to disturb her; and it was not till she lay down, that Juliet awoke, when rousing up for a moment, she put her arms round Matilda's neck, and affectionately kissing her, said, "God bless you, kindest and dearest sister," and then sank off again into a calm and peaceful slumber.

Matilda remained long awake that night. After thinking over her conduct during the day, her thoughts turned upon her lost mother.

The late Mrs. Lonsdale was an exemplary character. Endowed with superior mental powers, and possessing great sweetness of temper, she was highly valued and beloved by all who knew her worth, and could appreciate her excellence. To her husband and children she was an object of the most devoted love, and her untimely death left a void in their existence that never could be supplied. For nearly a year before her demise, Mrs. Lonsdale was aware of her approaching end, and in the hope of lessening the effects of her loss as much as possible to her family, she endeavoured to train her eldest daughter in some measure to fill her place. The mother discovered traits of character in her child, which under careful culture she knew would ripen into excellence, so that, notwithstanding Matilda's tender age, she looked forward to the time when she herself should be removed from all those she held most dear on earth with less anxiety than she otherwise would have done. Mrs. Lonsdale did not fear to die: she would have hailed with joy the prospect of entering into everlasting rest, if it had not been for the thought of those whom she was to leave behind. It was a painful task for a mother to tell a daughter of such deep affection as Matilda, that she was about to leave her; but by degress she brought the girl to listen to her without those passionate bursts of grief, which at first frequently wholly overcame both parent and child. Mrs. Lonsdale, herself a truly religious character, called in the aid of sacred truths to recon-

cile her daughter to what was inevitable. She impressed on Matilda's youthful mind the duty of resignation to the Divine will, and repeatedly assured her that whatever God designs for us, is the best thing that can happen. She taught her to have constant recourse to prayer, which would not fail to strengthen and comfort her in all her trials and afflictions.

These frequent conversations with her mother produced a marked effect on Matilda's character; for in her great desire to do all, and to be all her beloved mother wished, her mind acquired a solidity and her actions a consistence and propriety far beyond her years.

Although Mrs. Lonsdale never held out any prospect of her ultimate recovery, her conversations with Matilda often assumed a character of cheerfulness; and as her instructions were frequently blended with amusement, the young girl at times listened to her mother without pain, and always with the deepest interest. And so hard is it for the human heart to divest itself entirely of hope, that Matilda, who was by nature gay and of a sanguine disposition, frequently found herself indulging in the thought that it might be possible, after all, that the mother she so deeply loved would perhaps recover.

But the sad reality came at last, and dispelled for ever Matilda's occasional dreams of happiness, leaving her to derive what consolation she could under her heavy bereavement, from striving to her utmost to do what her mother would approve of, and to emulate those virtues and endearing qualities, which had bound her to her parent with the strongest ties of filial affection.

In every trying situation, the good principles which her mother had implanted in her mind, came to Matilda's assistance; and when temptation and trial were over, she would ask herself this question:

"Have I acted in such a manner as my dearest mamma would have approved of?"

On thus examining herself, on the night following the day, the history of which has just been related, did not Matilda's conscience give her an approving answer?

It did. Under unpleasant treatment, she had conducted herself like a dutiful daughter. She had been disappointed of a long-expected pleasure, she had been heavily tasked, and yet no complaint had escaped her lips, nor had she returned any sullen answers, but, on the contrary, she had met her father with cheerful smiles, and an obliging manner.

The peace of mind that visited Matilda that night, afforded her more gratification than perhaps she would have derived from Mrs. Stanley's party, however pleasant that party might have been.

CHAPTER II.

The Father of the family leaves home for a few days. Employment of the Daughters. Rupert's Purchases. Ann Rushton. A Present. Flowers. The Children make themselves useful at the Cottage helping a poor neighbour. Desire of Employment. A Race. Conversation with a Little Sister. Evening Occupation.

THE following morning the sisters were up early, and set diligently about their duties and occupations, hoping to gain a little time for a walk, and to pay a visit to their old friend Ann Rushton, whom they had not lately seen; Mr. Lonsdale having, for several days, so fully employed his daughters in various ways, that they had had no time for recreation, nor even for their accustomed exercise.

A good night's rest had calmed the irritation of Juliet's mind, and revived her spirits; and desirous to make amends for her inattention of the previous day, she offered, after breakfast, to make the necessary application to her father, for money for the wants of the family; but while she was consulting with her sister on the subject, Mr. Lonsdale entered the room where his daughters were, and laying down some money before them, said,—

"This will supply the wants of the family for two or three days;" and after repeating his customary injunctions "Not to waste," "Not to be extravagant," he walked away, without paying any attention to, or even seeming to hear, Matilda's inquiry as to what he would like for dinner.

Matilda did not repeat her question at that time, intending, after a little while, to follow her father to his room. But about half an hour afterwards, on Harriet's coming to speak to her on some domestic

affair, Matilda learned that her papa was gone out, and would not dine at home that day; and the servant further added, that she thought her master would be absent for three days, as he had desired to have some fresh arrangements made in his room, and to have them finished by the following Friday, when he should be at home again.

As soon as Juliet heard this piece of intelligence, she was instantly for setting out on her walk; and Matilda had to exert considerable powers of persuasion to induce her sister to remain quiet till she had earned her pleasure by first attending to her studies, and had assisted in the performance of several necessary duties; besides, there were the two younger children to attend to; there was to hear them read, and set them new lessons; added to which, Juliet had undertaken to teach Rupert to play on the pianoforte, and had begun a little with Kate, and Matilda considered it necessary that no day should be allowed to pass without some practice.

Juliet's patience was further tried by one or two dull morning callers, who delayed the dinner-hour, so that by the time that meal was over, it was near four o'clock before the young party set out on their walk.

The day was remarkably fine for the time of year—the latter end of the month of March; the sun shone bright, and the air was soft and balmy; the way, too, was very pleasant, for it lay through fields enamelled with the earliest flowers of spring, and dotted here and there with troops of sheep, with their milk-white lambs gambolling beside them. At the end of the meadows was a small heath, at the further side of which stood the little rustic abode of the young Lonsdales' friend, Ann Rushton.

Ann Rushton was the widow of a small farmer who, dying when she was a very young woman, left her to bring up two little children. This she did in a very creditable manner; and contrived, by frugality and industry, to lay by a small sum, which, in her old age,

afforded her a weekly pittance. She was a kind-hearted woman, honest and true in all her dealings, but, above all, she had a high sense of religion, and was possessed of an earnest desire to truly love and serve her Maker. Now, in the evening of her days, she had the satisfaction of looking back on a well-spent life, and anticipating, with humble hope, the time that was to change her lowly state of poverty and privation to an endless eternity of peace and joy.

With Mrs. Lonsdale this poor woman had always been a favourite; she visited her in sickness, and often supplied her with a few little comforts, such as her poverty prevented her from procuring for herself. Mrs. Lonsdale admired her plain good sense, and was interested by the shrewd observations she made on different characters and events; and she would often listen, with genuine pleasure, to her religious conversations, which were dictated by plain rational piety.

And not only did Mrs. Lonsdale find gratification in visiting her humble friend herself, but from their early childhood, she was in the habit of taking her children to see the "old woman on the heath," and on setting out for a walk, they would constantly cry out, "Let us go to the nice, tidy old woman who lives in such a neat cottage, and has such a pretty little garden full of sweet flowers."

As they grew older, the children, especially Matilda, used to listen to old Ann's conversations with their mamma, and felt interested by the good sense, patience, and resignation she displayed. Her cheerful manners, too, won their regard, and they grew to love her for the kind notice she took of them, and the way in which she entered into all their little histories of their pains and pleasures.

In the first days of Matilda's grief for the loss of her mother, her greatest comfort seemed to be in walking to Ann Rushton's cottage, and after pouring out her sorrows to her old friend, to listen to the

words of comfort and of kindness she would offer. These meetings always terminated by Matilda's reading aloud a chapter or two in the Bible, which was a great gratification to the old woman.

In some of the last days of her life, Mrs. Lonsdale begged her daughters ever to remember old Ann, and bid them frequently visit her, and be careful to supply her from time to time with those little comforts which at her age she stood greatly in need of. One part of their mamma's injunction, namely, visiting the poor woman, was willingly and, generally speaking, easily complied with; but it often sadly taxed Matilda's ingenuity to find the means of making her humble friend those little presents which she was accustomed to receive during the lifetime of Mrs. Lonsdale. The money with which Mr. Lonsdale supplied his daughter for the expenses of housekeeping became less and less every week, and though not at all in her father's confidence, Matilda somehow or other became aware that his income was very much less than it used to be.

It was at all times the earnest desire of Matilda to do all that her beloved mother had required of her; but in this instance she was deeply interested in the fulfilment of her wishes, and she often consulted with her sister on the subject.

Juliet was as anxious as Matilda that poor Ann should not lose any of the little comforts to which she had been long accustomed, and she readily gave up for her benefit a small sum of money which she had hoarded up to purchase some favourite books.

Matilda produced her store also; but when these little savings were expended, the sisters were quite at a loss what to do. Sometimes, by good management, Matilda contrived, without deprivation to the family, to make her old friend a little meat pie or a small pudding; but the treat was more often furnished by Matilda's, and occasionally Juliet's, putting by a portion of their own dinner, to send or carry to the cottage.

Now and then Matilda had asked her father for wine for her old friend, at those times when she was ill or more than usually weak, and he had occasionally fetched a bottle from the cellar, or he would desire his daughter to take what wine was left in the decanter. Matilda always felt grateful to her father for this kindness, at the same time that she made the remark that for the next day or two he drank no wine himself. But latterly, Mr. Lonsdale had replied angrily to his daughter when she had applied to him, saying,—

"That with such an expensive family as his, it was not likely that he should be supplying the poor of the parish with wine."

On the present afternoon, the girls had the pleasure of bestowing rather a larger gift on their old friend than they had been able for some time past to do. Matilda had made an exact calculation of how much of the money Mr. Lonsdale had given her she need expend in the family; and she found by good management she could spare a little of it to make a few purchases for poor Ann. Rupert had been despatched with a basket early in the day to the shop, taking with him a small list of commissions, and the money to pay for them. Matilda liked to accustom her brother to the use of money, and to habits of correctness in regular payments. It certainly was not much that she could do in this way, but the little that she did, assisted in bringing him forward in calculation, and taught him the value of things in daily use.

The little boy seemed to feel the importance of the trust that was reposed in him, and was always most anxious to render a just account of every farthing even he paid or took in change.

On first setting out on their walk, Rupert begged to carry the basket containing Ann's little presents, apparently thinking that the gift was in a great measure owing to his having made the purchases at the shop; but he soon deposited his burden in the

hands of his eldest sister, in order that he might join Kate in gathering the flowers beside their path, or in her endeavours to catch one of the pretty little lambs, to stroke it.

On arriving at the cottage, the young party found their old friend cheerful as usual, and rejoiced to see them. She was occupied in her little garden, raking one of her flower-borders, and she pointed out with evident satisfaction, to the notice of the children, some fine auriculas in beautiful bloom, and called their attention to an apricot-tree trained beside the casement window, which, facing the south, and sheltered from the keen spring winds, was just putting forth its delicate blossoms. She then led the way into the cottage, where some sticks were blazing under the kettle, for tea; her work and Bible were lying on the table, and on the chair where she had been sitting was an open book of "Meditations." This book had been a present of Mrs. Lonsdale's, and Ann Rushton's name was written by her at the beginning, with a few kind words from the "giver."

Matilda drew the book to her, and after gazing affectionately on her beloved mother's well-known handwriting, she glanced at the part which had just engaged her old friend's attention.

"You have been reading mamma's favourite, I perceive," said she, looking up at Ann, who was regarding her young friend with looks of tender pity.

"Yes, dear," replied Ann, "I often read that meditation; and never fail to do so when anything has occurred to trouble me: I find consolation and comfort from it."

"Nothing has happened lately to annoy you, I hope?" inquired Matilda, anxiously.

"Little troubles will arise for all, even the happiest of us," said Ann, turning to remove her boiling kettle from the fire; then smilingly addressing the little boy, who was filling a mug with flowers for his old friend, she added, "we find weeds mixed with our sweetest

flowers, gather them where we may; do we not, Master Rupert?"

"Yes," replied the boy, laughing; "I often get stings from nettles; but I do not mind, if I can gather sweet flowers. Look at these, Ann; are they not very pretty?"

"You had better let Ann make her tea," said Juliet, who had been for some time busying herself in various little preparations for the comfort of her old friend, setting the tea-tray, and putting the teapot and cup and saucer on it, and bringing forth from the cupboard a small piece of bread, and placing a knife beside it.

"But where, Ann," said she, "are the tea and sugar? I have searched in the place where you have told me to look when I come and play at being your maid. This," continued she, shaking a little tea-caddy, "is quite empty, and there is not a grain of sugar in the basin neither is there any butter, nor anything at all to make you a comfortable meal."

"You are mistaken, dear Miss Juliet," said Ann, with a pleasant smile; "here is some milk to mix with the water. I am not going to drink tea this evening."

"That is because you have none in the house," said Juliet. "Poor Ann! I wonder how long you have been without?"

"Not long," replied Ann, with an air of perfect content.

"At any rate you will not go without this evening," said Matilda, bidding Rupert bring forward his basket. The little boy, well pleased, took out one parcel and then another, and laid them on the table, exclaiming,—

"There is tea for you, and there is sugar, and there is butter, and there is a little loaf."

"Oh! Master Rupert!" cried Ann, "how kind you all are to me! Thank you, my dear young friends. But I fear you give me too much."

"By no means," replied Matilda; "you are most

welcome to all we have brought you. I only wish we could have given you some wine; but—"

"Do not speak of it," said Ann, interrupting her young friend; "you do too much for me as it is—far too much; and as to wine, I have no need of it now."

"Now make your tea," said Juliet, who had put the kettle on to boil up afresh, and was waiting to pour out the water.

"You will all take a cup with me, I hope," said Ann. "It smells delicious," continued she, as the grateful vapour rose on Juliet's pouring the boiling water on to the tea.

"Only one cup between us," replied Juliet, "just to try if it is good, and to keep you company."

"I am sure it is good tea," said Rupert; "the young man who sold it me said it was excellent; but I do not want any; and while my sisters sit and talk with you, Kate and I will go and break some sticks, ready to light your fire in the morning;" so saying, he ran off, followed by Kate, to a shed, where he had often been before on the same errand.

Mrs. Lonsdale had accustomed her children to be kind and obliging to the poor, and often sent them to their cottages to listen to any tale of distress, and to render any small services in their power.

After a little cheerful conversation with their old friend, and having had the gratification of seeing her enjoy her evening meal, the sisters drew from her, though she was reluctant to tell, the reason why she was more than usually bare of provisions; and it appeared that she had lent the chief part of her weekly allowance to a neighbour poorer than herself, to help pay the expense of the train to a distant place, to visit a sick daughter. Juliet eagerly inquired if Ann would receive her money back again; but the old woman seemed doubtful on this point, at the same time that she said she was sure her poor neighbour would repay her if she could; but if not, it was no great matter to suffer a trifling privation; and she added that she

was most thankful to have had it in her power to do a kindness to a fellow-creature.

This obliging act was by no means a solitary instance, for Ann was always ready, as far as her small strength or her scanty means would allow, to help those who were in greater need than herself.

How often is it the case that the poor do more to assist and serve their neighbours in sickness and distress than the rich, under similar circumstances, do for one another.

In course of conversation with her young friends, Ann mentioned that her eyes were better than they had been of late, and that she should be glad to increase her little allowance by doing any trifling job of work; and Matilda promised that she should have some stockings of her papa's, which he wished to have lengthened by pieces being knit on at the top. Ann was a good knitter, and this work would suit her well. Juliet inquired whether her old friend had finished reading the last book which had been lent her, and hearing that she had, and was very desirous of having another, the girl promised to bring her one the next day. She said she would lend Ann a book of travels, that would tell her about a great many of the wonders of the world.

The old woman brightened at the prospect of so much entertainment; for though she passed much of her time in reading her Bible, and books of a serious character, there were many hours when she experienced the weariness and lassitude necessarily attendant upon infirm health and old age.

When the time for parting arrived, Matilda and Juliet quitted Ann with regret, for she had been more than usually cheerful, and had expressed great pleasure in the company of the sisters; and she had been cheered, too, by their kindness, and the welcome present they had brought her.

Matilda summoned Rupert and Kate, who came forward, each loaded with a bundle of sticks, which

they had prepared for Ann's fire. Ann commended and thanked the children for their diligence; and after the girls had again repeated their assurance that they would not fail to come again the next day and bring the work and the amusing book, the party set forward home.

When they had proceeded a little way, Juliet looked back, and saw Ann still standing at her cottage-door.

"See," said she, "our poor friend is looking after us."

"She is not looking at us," replied Matilda, who had stopped and turned round; "she is gazing above those soft pink clouds into the blue sky. She is thinking of her future home beyond those bright regions. What a wonderful and blessed change will Heaven be to her!"

"Yes," said Juliet, warmly entering into her sister's feelings, "no more privations and poverty and suffering there!" Then a moment after, she added, "I cannot think how the poor soul bears all she has to endure with such patience and cheerfulness."

"It is," replied Matilda, "her love of God, and faith in His holy promises, that enable her to endure what she does."

"And it must be our part," said Juliet, "to attend constantly to her, and give her as many little good things as we can; and we must contrive, if possible, to go and see her oftener."

"I am very glad;" replied Matilda, "that we have been able to visit her to-day, and there will be nothing to prevent our doing so to-morrow."

"Nothing," answered Juliet; "and now I should like a race over this nice green meadow—there is no person to interrupt us; I feel that I have been so much shut up lately, that I want stronger exercise than usual to invigorate me. Come, shall we start? No; I see you are not for a race just now; Rupert and I then will have a run, and you can follow with Kate;" so saying, the lively girl challenged her brother, and

in a moment was coursing along as lively, and for the moment, as free from care as the young lambs that were frisking beside the hedge-rows.

Matilda, in the meanwhile leading her little sister by the hand, talked to her of the flowers, the trees, the birds, and all the works of Nature that gave a charm to their walk, and taught her that all the pleasures she enjoyed, and every good that happened to her, came from God; and that she must learn to love Him above everything in the world, and strive to please him, and to remember that wherever she was, or whatever she was doing, His eye beheld her.

Matilda remembered that it was in this way her mamma had once talked to her, and unfolded her infant mind; and in every respect this young girl desired to tread in the steps of the parent whose memory she cherished with most tender affection.

The walk over, the evening was pleasantly ended by reading and music. But before retiring to rest, Matilda, being desirous of improving the young woman in their service, called her into the parlour and heard her read, and then, as usual, Harriet joined the sisters in family prayer.

CHAPTER III.

Unpleasant Discovery. Heedlessness. Regularity and Order. Repentance. Juliet takes the Club-Book to Mr. Burke's. Painful Suspense. Happy Result of a Visit. Invitation from Mrs. Stanley. Struggle between Duty and Pleasure. Performing a Promise by Deputy. Pleasant Visit. Consequences. Visit to Broomheath. A Fright. Mrs. Rushton's illness. Uneasiness of Mind.

One of Matilda's first occupations on the following morning, was to look out the work for Mrs. Rushton, which was placed with Juliet's book of travels, ready to carry to the cottage, when the hour for recreation arrived. As the day was fine, the sisters agreed that they would dine before going out, as by that means they would be able to stop the longer with their poor friend. But when dinner was over, and the girls were putting the room in order previous to setting off, Juliet discovered, lying on a chair under some music, a club-book, which Mr. Lonsdale had given her the day before, with a strict injunction to send it by the servant to Mr. Burke, who was the subscriber next in order.

Juliet almost started when she made this discovery. Her papa had written on the paper cover of the book the date of the day that it was to be sent on; and he would be very angry to find that his command had not been attended to. Juliet knew that a fine was exacted from every member who did not strictly comply with the rules enjoined by the book society to which Mr. Lonsdale belonged; and also that, owing to a good deal of recent negligence, one or two of the members had been fined, and it was resolved that every case of inattention should, for the future, be punished in a similar way.

What was to be done! "What could she do?" she inquired of her sister.

Matilda, after reflecting a little on the matter, suggested that Juliet should take the book, and go herself to Mr. Burke's, and state the case just as it was; namely, that her papa, before going out yesterday, had dated the book, and had desired her to send it without fail, and that she had put it aside till the servant was at liberty to carry it, and had afterwards unfortunately forgotten it.

Both sisters agreed that the omission could not have occurred in a worse quarter, and Juliet, first asserting her firm belief that her papa would be made to pay the fine, and that she should incur great displeasure, declared that she had not the courage to encounter Mr. Burke; and that he, being such a precise, cross old man, she should be unwilling to go to him, even on a pleasant errand. She said a note would explain everything, and urged Matilda to write for her, adding that she would express what was necessary to be said so much better than she could herself. Matilda, though much concerned for her sister, and most willing to assist her, said that she still thought it would be much better, instead of writing, that Juliet should go and speak to Mr. Burke, and that if she did so, he might be induced to pardon the inadvertent mistake, and say nothing more about it. She said, too, that she was of opinion that notwithstanding his unpleasant manner, he was not a bad-hearted man, and reminded her sister of some acts of kindness that he had been known to do towards persons in distress. Still Juliet stood irresolute, weighing in her mind the disagreeable alternative of having to confess her negligence to a man of whom she was afraid, or to bear the severe displeasure of her father, which she well knew her inattention to his orders would draw upon her, as soon as he returned home. She regretted, in strong terms, that she had been so thoughtless in the present instance,

and lamented the general heedlessness of her character.

"I cannot think how it is," she exclaimed, "that I forget so what I am told, and what I ought to do. What can be the reason, Matilda? I am always getting into some scrape or other, and have to bear so much blame. What shall I do? I shall quite dread to see papa;" and sitting down, she began to cry.

"Do not cry, dear," said Matilda, kindly; "what has happened cannot be helped, and I do really think that if you will have the resolution to take the book to Mr. Burke's yourself, all will end well. Do take my advice, and go."

But Juliet could not make up her mind to do so; and the sisters fell into a little discussion upon regularity and order, and the necessity of acquiring a habit of thoughtfulness in the fulfilment of daily duties. Matilda was very orderly, and feeling the advantage of being so, she was desirous that her sister should also become methodical. From not having the habit of putting things in their places, Juliet's time was often wasted in seeking for what she wanted, and she was too much accustomed to put aside for a time what would have been better done immediately. This fault of Juliet's often got her into disgrace, and caused much vexation not only to herself but to her sister, who tenderly loved her. Besides sorrow for Juliet's trouble, it must be confessed that the want of order and the fault of not paying sufficient attention to orders, often occasioned Matilda a good deal more trouble in her small domestic concerns, and indeed in other matters as well. Juliet often lamented her own deficiency; and at such times her sister took the opportunity, in a kind and gentle manner, of placing before her the disadvantages arising from carelessness, and endeavoured to induce her to be more attentive and thoughtful.

On the present occasion Juliet was fully sensible, even without any comments on the part of her sister,

of how unwise her conduct had been. She knew how very particular her father had ever been to have the club books forwarded precisely at the proper time, and now that strict attention to the rules of the society was enforced, inattention on the subject would be doubly objectionable. She repeated again and again that she knew she ought not to have forgotten the book, and that being well aware how thoughtless she was, she should have kept it in her sight till Harriet was able to carry it to its place of destination.

Matilda fully entered into her sister's distress; and finally persuaded her to adopt what she considered the best mode of repairing her error.

Meanwhile the time had passed on, and it had struck three o'clock before Juliet set out for Mr. Burke's house, which was nearly a mile off. Before going, the penitent girl regretted the loss of her pleasant walk and her visit to poor Ann, at the same time she told her sister to go without her; but this Matilda refused to do, saying she would wait with pleasure, and that she should be robbed of half her enjoyment if Juliet was not with her; adding, there would still be plenty of time after Juliet's return to visit Ann, besides which, she said, the books must be re-arranged some time or other, and she would employ herself about them while her sister was absent; and as to Kate and Rupert, they would amuse themselves very well in the meanwhile in the garden.

On arriving at Mr. Burke's, the servant informed Juliet that both her master and mistress were out, but that she expected them in every minute; and inquired if she would not like to wait. Juliet thought she had better do so, and was shown into a dull room, where she passed some time in an uncomfortable state of suspense, sometimes thinking she would return home and get Matilda to write a note, and then again resolving to wait. A long half hour was thus passed, when fortunately she espied a book lying in a dark corner of the room; taking it up, she found the

contents so amusing, that another half hour slipped away so pleasantly that she even forgot the purport of her visit, when she was painfully reminded of it by the entrance of the master of the house, looking very crabbed. It so happened that the servant had omitted to mention Juliet's arrival, and he gazed at the intruder in no pleasant mood, and then abruptly demanded what she wanted.

Juliet immediately came forward, and in a diffident manner explained the nature of her errand, and apologized for her negligence.

There is something in the candid avowal of a fault, when it is accompanied by a gracious manner, that seldom fails, in instances like the present, to carry weight with it; and Mr. Burke, after examining the book, and assuring himself that the day of the month was really in Mr. Lonsdale's hand-writing, said,—

"Well, I dare say the case is as you state, and I must overlook the mistake; set your mind at rest, I shall say nothing about it. Good-by. Always speak the truth as you have done now; it is the best way."

Juliet was greatly relieved at this happy termination of her trouble, and she was returning home in high spirits, and had got about half way there, when she encountered Mrs. Stanley, who said she was on her way to call on her and Matilda, to invite them to pass the evening at Beachwoods, as she wished to introduce them to her young friends from town.

"And," continued she, "you must bring your music with you, that we may show the London ladies what we can do in that way in the country."

Juliet was delighted at this invitation, and gladly accepted it.

Mrs. Stanley bid her make haste, saying that she would then reach Beechwoods by daylight, and that she would send her and her sister home at night.

Juliet needed not to be told to make haste, for she walked away as fast as she could, so impatient was she to reach home, and to tell her sister of the pleasant

news. But, notwithstanding her eagerness, it was considerably past five o'clock before she arrived; for, besides having to wait so long at Mr. Burke's, and her encounter with Mrs. Stanley, she was twice detained to speak to some ladies she met on the road, and towards whom she considered it would appear rude if she had not remained while they wished to talk to her.

Matilda had finished the books, and was in the garden playing with the little ones, at the same time that she was wondering what could have so long detained her sister. Juliet hastened to her, and with great glee imparted her agreeable news; but her joy received a sudden check when Matilda reminded her of their engagement with Ann Rushton, and said that they could not accept Mrs. Stanley's invitation.

"But I have accepted it;" said Juliet, recovering herself in a few moments.

"We have previously promised Ann to go and see her this evening," said Matilda.

"We must do both," said Juliet.

"That is impossible, dear," replied Matilda; "you know we must not be out after dark, and there is only just time for us to get to Ann's cottage and back, and stay about five minutes with her, and be at home by sunset."

"What can be done?" said Juliet. "Go we must to Mrs. Stanley's; you remember we sent an excuse before; and if we do so now, she will be offended, and very likely not invite us again,—at any rate, not for a long while."

"Ann will be so disappointed not to see us," said Matilda, "and to have the book of travels, and the work also; besides, we promised to go, and I cannot break my promise."

"Indeed," urged Juliet, "we must go to Beachwoods; it will be such a pleasant visit, and I have a great wish to hear the London young ladies play."

"I should like it too," said Matilda; "but—"

"But," interrupted Juliet, "I am sure you will not disappoint me; you know we can go to Ann's at any time; and I do so very much wish to accept Mrs. Stanley's invitation."

"I should be unhappy to break my promise," replied Matilda; "not to say anything of the disappointment we should cause our poor old friend."

"I will tell you what we will do," said Juliet; "we will take the book and the work, and leave them, as we go to Beachwoods, at our laundress's, and desire her to send her daughter with them; little Beckey will be delighted with the walk. That will do just as well as our going; so do not look so grave, Matilda, dear, but come along, and let us make haste and dress."

But Matilda still objected, when it struck her that the best way of settling the business would be for Juliet to accept Mrs. Stanley's invitation, and for her to go to Ann Rushton's.

To this proposition Juliet would not listen; she positively refused to go without her sister to Mrs. Stanley's, saying that it would afford her no pleasure to go alone; besides, her music would be nothing without Matilda's. She was equally unwilling to go to Ann's, saying that it was a matter of no real importance, for that the work and the book of travels would reach their old friend the same as if they took them themselves; and she expressed such a strong wish to go to Beachwoods, and so earnestly begged her sister not to disappoint her, that Matilda at last consented.

Juliet was delighted, and flew to make a selection of music to take to Beachwoods, while Matilda wrote a kind note to Ann, stating the reason of her not performing her promise, and at the same time assuring her old friend that she might depend on seeing her the next day. This note, together with the book and work, were carefully deposited on the hall slab, with strict injunctions to the servant to give them to Beckey as soon as she called.

On arriving at the laundress's, the sisters found

that the child was out; but her mother said she expected her in every minute, and that she would be sure to send her directly she returned, and that the young ladies might depend upon having their errand punctually executed; and Matilda felt satisfied that it would be so.

The visit to Beachwoods proved very agreeable; Mrs. Stanley was, as usual, kind and obliging; and her young friends, though clever, were pleasant and unassuming. There was a great deal of music. Matilda found that she played two or three pieces which the eldest Miss Langton had been studying under her master, a first-rate professor, and that young lady imparted to her the manner in which he performed a few particular passages, so as to render them more effective. The youngest Miss Langton praised Juliet's style of singing; and she and Juliet sung a duet together, which gave general satisfaction; and both the Miss Langtons declared that they knew many young ladies in London, who had been taught by very superior masters, who were not near so far advanced in music as Matilda and Juliet. Juliet was delighted with their praise, neither was Matilda insensible to it; and the sisters agreed, as they returned home, that it was a long time since they had passed an evening so pleasantly, and so free from anxiety.

But Matilda's happiness received a sudden check on entering her home, for directly facing her, on the hall slab, lay the work, book, and note, which were to have gone to Ann Rushton's that evening. Matilda eagerly sought an explanation of the servant, and was informed that the laundress's child had not called according to promise.

This was a most vexatious circumstance; and Matilda blamed herself very much for not having taken the book and work herself to her poor friend, instead of deputing another to do what she had promised. Juliet, too, was sorry that Ann should have been disappointed, but she assured her sister that she

censured herself unnecessarily, and that she had done all that could possibly be required, by desiring Beckey to call, and that it was no fault of hers that the child failed to do as she was requested.

Matilda listened to her sister, and would have been glad to think as she did, but she could not divest herself of the idea that she had done wrong; and she had a dread on her mind lest Ann should have been unwell and needed assistance. It appeared to Matilda that on the previous evening her humble friend had looked paler, and seemed more weak than usual, and should she be in want of medicine or attendance of any sort, she had no one at hand to help her, for her lodger was gone away, and no other person had as yet supplied her place.

There was nothing to be done that night; but on the following day, the moment Matilda had performed her earliest morning duties, she set out to pay Ann a visit. Rupert begged to accompany her, and his sister said that if he could be contented to go without his breakfast, and only take a piece of bread in his hand to eat as he went along, as she was herself going to do, he might walk with her. The brother and sister went quickly on their way, and crossed the last meadow as the church clock struck nine.

"We shall surprise Ann by going to see her so early," said Rupert, as they got up to the cottage; "I wonder what she will say."

Matilda made no reply; for she was painfully struck by seeing the curtains of Ann's bed-room window closed, the door tight shut, and no appearance that betokened that the inhabitant of the little dwelling was risen.

"What can be the matter?" exclaimed Matilda in an agitated manner, as she lifted the latch and found her entrance into the house stopped by the bolt being undrawn. "What can be the matter? Ann, Ann," she cried, "where are you? are you ill?"

But no answer was returned, and becoming more

seriously alarmed, Matilda shook the casement, and tried to open it, but it was fast closed from within; she then ran round to the back of the house, hoping the door there might be unfastened.

"Ann must be ill," said Rupert; "or perhaps she is gone out."

"Not gone out," returned his sister; "I wish she was. I fear, indeed, she is ill. O, may it be nothing worse!" And she tried again to effect an entrance into the cottage. But each door and window was fastened in the way in which the old woman was in the habit of securing her lowly dwelling at night.

Matilda knocked against the door, and called loudly as she raised her head to the window of Ann's bed-room, but no answer was returned. The frightened girl crept round again to the back of the cottage. She listened for some sound betokening life within, but a death-like stillness alone prevailed. She became more and more anxious to effect an entrance, and looked about to find the means of doing so.

The lower window was some considerable distance from the ground, but a broken pane suggested the idea that a small hand put in could unfasten the hasp; and Matilda thought that if she could contrive to raise up her brother, he would be able to unfasten the casement; and that she should thus have it in her power to get into the cottage. Rupert said he could pull himself up by the creepers that clustered round the window; and Matilda lifting him in her arms, he caught by their stems, and pulled himself up to the level of the broken pane, passed his arm through the aperture, undid the fastening, and pushed the casement open.

Matilda was very active, and in a few moments she contrived to make her way into the cottage, through the window thus fortunately opened. She lost no time in running up stairs; but at the door of

Matilda and Rupert at the Cottage.—P. 40.

Ann's room she paused, wanting the courage to open it, so great was her fear lest something had happened to her poor friend. But this hesitation lasted but a few moments; for if assistance was needed, Matilda felt it should be prompt. Resolutely, therefore, she unclosed the door and went in, and proceeded straight to the bed-side of her humble friend. The curtains were closed, but on drawing them aside, she was shocked to perceive poor Ann lying pale and motionless, and to all appearance dead!

Matilda burst into tears, and wept long and bitterly; then checking her grief, she stood earnestly gazing at the placid features of one to whom she was so strongly attached, and whom she now believed she had for ever lost. She bent over to kiss the poor woman's pallid cheek, when she fancied she perceived a faint breathing, and on examining more closely, she was convinced that she was not mistaken.

A burst of joy rushed through Matilda's heart, for it now struck her that Ann was not dead, but had fainted.

"Oh, Rupert!" exclaimed Matilda to her brother, who was standing crying beside her, "she is not dead; go, run as fast as you can, and fetch the doctor, bid him make haste; we may save her yet."

The boy flew to obey his sister's command, and Matilda began to chafe Ann's hands, and to try such means as were in her power in order to restore animation.

Before setting out, Matilda had put her share of the breakfast cocoa, mixed with milk and sugar, into a bottle to bring to Ann; and she now thought if she could contrive to get a small portion of it down her poor friend's throat, it might revive her. With trembling hands and beating heart, Matilda poured out some of the liquid, and tenderly raising Ann's head a little from her pillow, she moistened her lips with it, and by slow degrees got down a spoonful or two. The colour began to return, the breathing became stronger,

and at length, to Matilda's infinite joy, Ann unclosed her eyes. But the poor woman quickly relapsed into a state of insensibility; and Matilda, whose perceptions were quickened by long attendance on her sick mother, surmising that Ann was fainting from want of sustenance, had again recourse to the nutritious beverage, which had already been productive of very beneficial results, and she had the happiness of seeing that the remedy was again successful, and this time even more so than at first, for the poor woman made one or two faint attempts to speak.

Matilda, knowing that any exertion must be very wrong, if not dangerous, for Ann, under such circumstances, quitted the sick chamber for a few minutes, and went down stairs and unfastened the door and the shutters, and then hastened to light a fire and put on the kettle in case the doctor should require any hot water when he came, listening attentively all the time for any sound that might indicate that her presence was wanted above, and once or twice creeping softly up stairs to steal a look unobserved at the object of her earnest solicitude.

The patient seemed to be going on well, and after taking a little more nourishment, she fell into a gentle sleep, which so much refreshed her, that by the time Mr. Knight, the medical man, arrived, she was able briefly to say how she felt, and to state from what cause her illness had arisen.

It appeared that, some years ago, Mrs. Rushton had been subject to fainting fits of a very serious nature, but which, on consulting an eminent physician, had been subdued, and ultimately kept off by his prescription. This prescription she had carefully preserved, as she had been directed to have recourse to it whenever she felt any symptoms warning her of a return of her complaint. Two or three days previous to the last visit of the young Lonsdales, she thought it best to be provided with the medicine, and accordingly procured it from a druggist. On the afternoon fol-

lowing that on which the juvenile party had visited her, as she was preparing her tea, she was seized with an attack of her complaint; but it came on her so suddenly that, just as she had reached the bottle of medicine from the cupboard where she had placed it, she fell down insensible. On coming to herself, she found the bottle broken and all the contents spilt. After lying still a little while, she contrived to rise, fasten up her cottage, and get to bed, where it appeared to her she had passed the chief part of the night in a state of insensibility.

Matilda was deeply grieved at this account, and blamed herself more than ever for not having kept her promise; for had she come to Ann's cottage, she would have been by to assist her poor friend, who would, in all probability, have been thus saved from the worst part of her attack, and would not have had to pass a long, dreary night alone and without any one near to help her. Matilda followed Mr. Knight down stairs, and begged him to tell her if he considered Mrs. Rushton in danger.

Mr. Knight, who had gathered how the case stood with Matilda, spoke kindly to her, and told her he trusted that with care and strict attention to his directions, her poor friend would recover. He added, that, learning from Rupert the state in which Mrs. Rushton was, he had provided himself with the restoratives that he had already administered, and that in the course of an hour or two, he would send her some more medicines. He desired that his patient might be kept perfectly quiet, and that she must on no account be spoken to on agitating subjects.

In consequence of this last direction, Matilda forbore dwelling on the regret she felt at not having kept her promise; at the same time, she did not think it wrong to read over the contents of the note written the previous morning, and to tell her that Beckey had failed to perform her errand.

Ann murmured her thanks, and then, fixing her

eyes, with an expression of deep gratitude, on her young friend, exerted herself to say,—

"You did more than was necessary; you are too good; you always do too much for me."

But these kind words of Ann's, though they soothed, did not by any means quiet Matilda's uneasy feeling, and she passed a day of distressing anxiety. She sent Rupert home to his dinner, with a request to Juliet to come to her as soon as she could, for she was anxious to go herself and find some careful person to stay with Ann during the night. Matilda would have been glad to have done so herself, but she knew she must not do such a thing without the permission of her papa.

Juliet, who had learned from Rupert, when he came to summons Mr. Knight, the state in which Ann was, had passed a very uncomfortable morning, for she felt that it was through her persuasion that Ann had not been visited the previous evening, and that, should she not survive, it would cause herself, as well as Matilda, serious regret. As soon, therefore, as she had given the children their dinner, and assigned them their different employments during her absence, she hastened off to join her sister at Broomheath, taking with her an egg her pet hen had laid that morning, hoping that Ann would be able to eat it.

On Juliet's arrival she found Matilda occupied in making the sick woman a cup of tea; and the sisters agreed that the egg beaten up and mixed with some of the liquid would be both pleasant and nutritious for her. Juliet was very desirous of being of use, and Matilda, feeling satisfied that she left her patient in careful hands, lost no time in setting forth to find a nurse. Matilda repaired to two or three cottages, not very far from Ann's home, and at one of them she was fortunate enough to find a kind-hearted woman, the wife of a labouring man, who often nursed her poor neighbours, and who was willing, without any compensation, to watch beside Mrs. Rushton during the night. Matilda returned well pleased with the

success of her errand, and after sitting a little while, enjoying the comfort of her sister's society, she advised Juliet to go home, promising to follow as soon as the nurse arrived.

Matilda was detained much longer than she expected, for the nurse's husband returning home much later than usual, she could not get away; and the sun had been set full two hours before Matilda set off home. It was a bright moonlight night, and she soon ran over the fields. She was not timid, and had she been so, she would have found no room for fear for herself, her mind being fully occupied with Ann; for, before leaving her, she observed symptoms of fever, which made her very uneasy. The poor woman's cheeks were flushed, her hands burning, and, worst of all, she seemed occasionally to wander in her mind. Matilda was too much used to illness not to know that these were bad signs; and when she reached the little town in which she resided, she went up it to the farther end, to call at Mr. Knight's, and report the state in which she had left Mrs. Rushton. Unfortunately, the medical man was out, and not expected back for some hours, neither was his assistant in the way; so with a heavy heart Matilda was obliged to return home, conscious that she was without the power to be of any further use, and compelled to remain away from the poor friend over whom she would have so gladly watched. It was in vain that she sought to calm her mind by employment; books, music, all her usual occupations, ceased to engage her attention; she could think of nothing but poor Ann, lying very ill in her cottage, and that had she kept her promise respecting her, much of this unhappiness would have been spared.

Juliet said she felt too much, and tried to console her; but Juliet's words, contrary to custom, failed to have a soothing power: for Matilda remembered that it was owing to the persuasions of her sister that this distress had come upon her. Matilda said something

of this kind, and Juliet began to cry, and then Matilda's feelings found vent in a burst of tears.

Juliet led away the children to bed, who had been overlooked, and allowed to sit up too late on this day of trouble.

Matilda, left by herself, thought over the occurrences of the past day, and then followed, as of course, —for she was used to the exercise,—a brief but honest self-examination, the effects of which were in part speedily and openly evinced; for on Juliet's return to the sitting-room, Matilda hastened up to her, and begged her to excuse the inconsiderate and unkind words she had used.

"I was so unhappy myself," said she, "that I forgot the feelings of another; I forgot to watch myself."

"I am sure," said Juliet, embracing her sister, "you did not mean to be unkind; what you said was too true; so do not cry any more."

"I was not," said Matilda, as she wiped away her tears,

'With constant watching wise,'

as our favourite hymn says. And now that I have said what I ought not, I call to mind Mr. James's sermon last Sunday. You remember it, I dare say; he told us that when our own feelings are excited and irritated by what is painful or disagreeable, we should watch carefully, so that we do not say or do anything to others that will be unpleasant to them. I do not quote his words right, I know, but that was his meaning."

"It is very difficult to do as he says," replied Juliet.

"We must keep constantly trying," said Matilda; "and now, dear, let us call the servant in, have prayers, and then go to bed, for I wish to go off to Broomheath to-morrow, directly it is light."

CHAPTER IV.

Illness. Medical Man. Benevolence. Kindness to the Poor. Mrs. Rushton's Daughter. Mr. Lonsdale's Return. Displeasure. Visits forbidden. Anxious Days. Return of Happiness. Conversation between a Father and Daughter. Breaking and keeping Promises. How to ensure a thing being well done. Happy Meeting. Recovery from Illness.

MATILDA passed a disturbed and restless night, and several times during the latter part of it she rose and went to the window to see if there were any indications of the coming day, so impatient was she to go to her poor friend and ascertain how she was. Matilda dreaded to find her more ill; and when at last she arrived at the cottage, her worst fears were confirmed. Poor Ann was in a high fever; and at times complained of a dreadful pain in her head. Her eyes looked terribly inflamed, and were very much swelled, and she refused all nourishment.

Matilda's first thought was to procure medical assistance; so she begged the nurse, who now wanted to return home, not to leave the poor woman at present, and ran back as fast as she could to the town, to implore Mr. Knight to come immediately to Ann's assistance.

Mr. Knight was a clever man, and in large practice, and when Matilda arrived at his house, he was just getting down from his chaise on his return from a sick person, with whom he had been sitting up all night. He was tired and worn, and anxious for a brief repose before setting out again to visit a round of patients; but he was as kind-hearted as he was skilful, and he could not resist Matilda's entreaties to go immediately to Broomheath; besides, Ann was a

poor woman, and the poor had always a large claim upon his benevolence; so, bidding Matilda get into his carriage, he drove off with her to visit the sick woman, instead of seeking the repose he so greatly needed.

The roadway to Broomheath was not much further than going by the fields, so that they were quickly at Ann's cottage, and Mr. Knight found that he had not been summoned at all too soon, if he was to be of any use.

The acute eye of the medical man immediately discovered the cause of Mrs. Rushton's increase of illness. In her fall she had injured her head.

Mr. Knight instantly took prompt measures for her relief, staying beside her, and attending to her with as much care and tenderness as if he was to receive a large reward on her recovery.

And surely such conduct has its reward—if not in this world, in the next.

Before leaving the cottage, Mr. Knight recommended Mrs. Rushton's daughter being written to, to come and attend upon her mother; and he promised Matilda that he would see his patient again in the course of the day, should he hear she was worse. The great difficulty with Matilda now was, how to get Ann's medicines to her; but here again Mr. Knight stood her friend, promising to have them immediately prepared and sent to Juliet, for her to forward.

This, and the next day, passed drearily on with Matilda; the poor woman did not get worse, but at her age, if she did not soon mend, there was great risk of her strength failing. The labourer's wife again sat up at night with her; and on the evening of the second day the daughter arrived to attend upon the mother.

Ann's daughter was inferior to her mother, but she was kind-hearted, grateful, and strongly attached to her parent; and Matilda left her old friend at night,

perfectly satisfied that she would be taken every care of.

Fortunately for Matilda's peace of mind, her papa did not return home for above a week; and she was therefore able to pass the chief part of her time with Ann, for the poor girl was wretched when she was away from her, and could not watch with her own eyes every fluctuation in the patient's illness.

Mr. Lonsdale arrived at home with every appearance of his jaunt, whatever it might have been, having afforded him neither pleasure nor profit. He was more than usually severe with his children; found fault with many things that had been done, complained of neglect in others, and expressed great displeasure at Matilda's frequent absence from home; for at the risk of drawing down great displeasure on herself, she took every opportunity of running off to Broomheath, whenever she could escape observation.

At last, Mr. Lonsdale positively forbade her leaving the house, saying that she was very idle, and neglected her duty. This was far from being the case; for by good management and rising early, she contrived that nothing should be left undone that required her attention. But Mr. Lonsdale missed her from home, and imagined that the case was as he said. The effect of this peremptory order upon Matilda was most distressing. Ann still continued in a very precarious state, and not being allowed to see her was most painful.

It was very seldom either, that Juliet could get away from home; and Broomheath was too far off for Rupert to be sent alone, except on an extraordinary occasion, such as occurred on the first day of Ann's illness. Very often a whole day, and sometimes two, or even three, passed without Matilda's learning any tidings of the sick woman.

Matilda was strongly attached to Mrs. Rushton; and since her mamma's death, it was to her she looked for counsel and advice, and from her judicious

and sensible conversation she derived comfort in the various troubles and trials that clouded her young life. Matilda felt that if her poor friend died, she had no one to supply her place; and to have her die, under present circumstances, would be an additional sorrow.

Now and then, Matilda got the laundress's child to go to Broomheath and make inquiries concerning Ann, and to carry her a little broth or some little dainty to tempt the sick woman's appetite; but Beckey was much wanted at home, and often detained a long while at the houses of her mother's customers, as was the case on the memorable evening when she failed to carry Ann the book and work; and she was, therefore, rarely to be had; and very often the little messes which it had cost Matilda not only much difficulty, but privation, to prepare, were spoilt before they could reach their destination.

The anxiety and disappointment to which Matilda was now constantly subjected, together with the harshness with which she was treated by her father, at last preyed upon her health. Her colour faded, she grew thin, and her appetite failed her. She no longer took pleasure in any of her customary pursuits, but would, when unemployed about the house or by Mr. Lonsdale, sit languidly with a book before her, sometimes trying to read, but more frequently dwelling on painful subjects, or giving way to bursts of tears.

In this melancholy manner she was sitting alone one evening when her father entered the room; but she was so absorbed in thought, that it was not till he spoke that she was aware of his presence.

At the sound of Mr. Lonsdale's voice, she started and looked up, expecting to hear herself blamed as usual; but the expression of his face was entirely different from what it had been of late. He was regarding her with looks of affection, such as he was wont to fix on her in days long since past.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" said he,

"you do not look well—you look as your mamma did in her last illness: you are very like her."

Encouraged by this return of kindness in her papa, Matilda took courage and opened her heart to him, telling him of Ann's illness, of her having broken her promise respecting her, and of the unhappiness it caused her to be debarred from visiting her poor friend, and doing any little thing in her power to alleviate her sufferings. Mr. Lonsdale listened attentively to what his daughter said, and appeared to enter into her feelings, and finally granted her his permission to go to Broomheath once every day, and occasionally to remain an hour with Mrs. Rushton. Matilda was very grateful for this concession on the part of her papa, and warmly expressed her thanks; then, seeing that he listened kindly to her, she sought with the confidence of former days, to hear how much he condemned her on a point respecting which she still could not satisfy herself that she had done right.

"Do you think I did very wrong, papa," said she, "in going to Mrs. Stanley's instead of visiting poor Ann?"

"You tell me," replied Mr. Lonsdale, "that you went to oblige your sister?"

"Yes," answered Matilda; "but I liked going myself; and if I had not, I cannot tell whether I should not have more resolutely refused to comply with Juliet's request: and this it is that makes me so uneasy on the subject."

"Still," said Mr. Lonsdale, "had you acted entirely by yourself, uninfluenced by your sister's persuasion, you would not have gone to the more amusing place, but have kept your promise to Mrs. Rushton?"

"That I would," exclaimed Matilda, eagerly; "I was very unwilling to disappoint Ann; and I did not like the not keeping my word; and, for some time, I refused positively to go."

"Juliet would have been very sorry, I suppose, not to have gone to Beachwoods and seen the London young ladies, and heard them sing and play?"

"She wished it exceedingly," said Matilda, "and urged me very much to accept Mrs. Stanley's invitation."

"And you wrote a note, you tell me," said Mr. Lonsdale, "to your humble friend, to explain the reason of your absence; and you moreover engaged a messenger to convey what you promised to send her?"

"But Beckey never came," said Matilda, sorrowfully.

Mr. Lonsdale pressed his hand on his daughter's shoulder, and said, deliberately,

"You will find, my dear, as your experience in life increases, how constantly our reliance on others is disappointed, and that if we would ensure a thing being done, we had better do it ourselves."

"The child and the mother," said Matilda, "I am sure would have kept their word if they could."

"But they were prevented, and so were you," said Mr. Lonsdale.

Matilda looked in her papa's face. "You blame me, I know," said she, "for not having kept my promise."

"I do not blame you, my dear," replied Mr. Lonsdale; "half the world, nay, almost everyone, would have done as you did. But take this as a general principle through life,—that those who are punctual in the fulfilment of their promises, who never forfeit their word, are the persons on whom reliance can be placed, and on whom that most high encomium can be passed, namely, 'They said they would do it, therefore I know they will.'"

Matilda pondered on these words, and felt a strong desire to be one of those on whom strict reliance could be placed. In the present instance her papa had not condemned her, and had told her that most others would have done as she did. Still she did not feel thoroughly satisfied, and said,—

"Papa, you used to say that we ought not to be contented with doing the same as others, but that we

should examine and judge for ourselves if the thing we do is right."

"And I say so still," replied Mr. Lonsdale, fixing an earnest look on his daughter. "You are young, Matilda, and a good girl, and may grow up to be an estimable woman. For myself—" Then, suddenly breaking off, he started up and abruptly quitted the room.

Matilda saw that her father was unhappy, and would have followed him, but Juliet coming in at the moment, said that he was gone into his study, and had shut-to the door and locked it.

Matilda then told her sister of the conversation she had been having with him, and of the change in his manner towards her, and of the hope she entertained of his being again to his children the kind father he had once been.

"At any rate, it is a happiness for you now," said Juliet, "that you have obtained papa's permission to go and see poor Ann every day."

"That is a great thing gained, indeed," said Matilda, with a smile and look of joy, such as had not lit up her wan countenance for a long time.

"How glad poor Ann will be to see you again!" said Juliet; "for Beckey said the other day, that Ann's daughter told her, that her mother, when her head is wandering, often repeats that her dear young lady has forsaken her, and then she will call out your name repeatedly. I would not tell you before, for I thought it would make you more unhappy."

"That was kindly meant, dear Juliet; but always tell me everything," said Matilda; "do not let us ever have any secrets from each other;" and Juliet promising that she would not, the sisters fondly embraced each other.

Matilda had not seen Mrs. Rushton for near a fortnight, and it appeared to her, when she paid her first visit after this long absence, that her old friend had improved in health; her voice was stronger, her eyes

brighter, and she could sit a little while upright in her bed without feeling faint. The pleasure, too, arising from having her dear young lady again with her, gave a degree of animation to her countenance, and brought a faint tinge of colour into her cheeks.

"You did not think I had forsaken you, Ann," said Matilda, the tears starting to her eyes as she spoke.

"Oh! no, my dear," replied the old woman, raising Matilda's hand and pressing it to her lips; "I should as soon doubt my own child as you."

"I could not come," said Matilda, with energy. "I—" She stopped short, and Ann said,—

"I understand; do not trouble yourself to explain. I know you wished to come to me. I believe," continued she, faintly smiling, "I said odd things in my fever, but—"

"But you wanted to see me," interrupted Matilda.

"I did, indeed," replied Ann; "and the sight of you now rejoices my old heart, and does me more good than any medicine."

"I am to come and see you every day," said Matilda, gaily; "papa has given me leave."

From this time Mrs. Rushton's recovery was more rapid, and by the beginning of summer the young Lonsdales had the pleasure of seeing their old friend once more going about her cottage, sitting in the porch, and tying up the roses and geraniums that grew beside it.

Perhaps the strokes of her hoe, as she weeded her little garden, were rather feebler than before her illness, and it might be that her sight was weaker, and she was unable to read and work quite so long at a time; but her recovery was altogether surprising, and she thanked God for sparing her life, and prayed that the remnant of her days might be blessed to some good purpose, either for herself or others.

CHAPTER V.

Riverton. Dancing Day. A Party in Expectation. A Listener. The Willow Meadows. Interesting Intelligence. The New Pupil. Reasons for coming to School. Discussion concerning Dress. Thoughtlessness. Expert Needle-women. Anticipated Pleasure. Affection for a Father. What is most desirable in the Female Character. Young Housekeeper. Peculiar Situation. When and on whom to place Reliance.

RIVERTON, where Mr. Lonsdale and his family resided, was a small country town, and like most places of the kind, numbered among its inhabitants two or three professional men, one or two retired tradesmen, a half-pay captain, and a few widows and single ladies. Neither was it wanting in places of education; for a clergyman took young gentlemen to prepare for a larger school, and an establishment for young ladies was kept by a highly respectable lady, of the name of Wright. Besides day scholars, Miss Wright generally mustered between thirty and forty boarders; so that her school might be considered a flourishing one. The young ladies entrusted to her care were, principally, the daughters of the wealthier tradesmen and farmers round about, with a very small sprinkling of the children of the neighbouring gentry.

One afternoon, about a week or ten days from the time Mr. Lonsdale had withdrawn his prohibition respecting Matilda's visits to Broomheath, Juliet was in the town for the purpose of making some little purchases. It was dancing day at Miss Wright's; and as she turned out of the haberdasher's shop, she saw on the opposite side of the way two or three young ladies who were returning home from having taken their lesson. On perceiving Juliet, one of them, Miss Eliza Moore, immediately crossed over.

Juliet had many friends among the young ladies of the place, but Miss Eliza Moore was her especial favourite; she liked her even better than she did Louisa Graham.

"How are you?" exclaimed Eliza, warmly shaking Juliet's hand; "how glad I am to see you! what a time it is since we met!"

"I have been staying at home a good deal lately," replied Juliet, slightly colouring.

"What have you been busy about, I wonder? How is Matilda? I thought she looked very ill last Sunday week at church."

"She is very well now," said Juliet; "she takes more out-door exercise."

"That is right," said Eliza; "you must tell me all about yourselves another time. I can only stop a few minutes now; and I have got a piece of news to tell you—such nice news! You will never guess it."

Juliet's eyes sparkled, and she was all delighted attention, while her friend proceeded,—

"Miss Wright is going to give a juvenile party. Not a 'last dancing-day' one, when all the day scholars and the young ladies who come to dance are shown into the front parlour, and have a piece of seed cake, and a baked apple in a saucer, but a real regular party."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Juliet, much excited

"Yes; and all the young ladies who have ever learned to dance are to be invited; you and Matilda, and many others. The party is to be on a dancing day. Mr. Ball, the dancing-master, is to be requested to give his lesson in the evening, instead of the morning; and Miss Wright intends to ask him not to teach at all then, but to play dances all the time he stops. And then we are to walk in the garden, have refreshments, and play at any games we like. And the big girls say they will hang the school-room round with flowers and evergreens. It will be so

pretty. And we are to stay up till eleven o'clock if we wish it; as Miss Wright says, 'it is only for once.'"

"How kind of her," said Juliet, "to think of giving so much pleasure! How came the thought into her head, I wonder? She never did such a thing before."

"Oh! I forgot," replied Eliza; "I have had so much to tell, that I have left out the great thing of all; but," continued she, lowering her voice, "I wish we could go somewhere, where we shall not be overheard; there is that disagreeable Mary Mills, the baker's daughter, standing close by, pretending to look into Mr. Crisp's shop, though she must know all his pomatum pots and faded boxes by heart, listening to us, and I dare say has overheard all I have been telling you. I did not know she was there; I wish she would go and sell her father's cakes."

"I did not observe her either," said Juliet; "but you have said nothing you need mind having overheard."

"Let us move away," said Eliza, and she drew her friend on; "here, let us go through this way into the willow meadows."

"What, through the White Lion yard?" said Juliet.

"Yes; there is nobody about there now," replied Eliza. "Grandmamma does not like my going to the willow meadows that way; but never mind, 'it is only for once,' as Miss Wright says."

"You had better not go, had you?" said Juliet, pausing.

"What, have you been told not?" inquired Eliza.

"No," replied Juliet, "papa never desired me not. You know we can get into the meadows at the back of our premises, without coming into the town."

"Come on then," said Eliza; "make haste; there are the Grahams walking towards us, and I do not want to be hindered; I have not half done telling you." So say-

ing, she put her arm through Juliet's, and, passing through the little inn yard, the friends were in the willow meadows in a minute.

"Sit down on this bank," said Eliza; "nobody will interrupt us here. I was going to tell you how Miss Wright came to think of giving this party."

Juliet seated herself beside her friend, and was all attention.

"You must know," said Eliza, "that there is a young lady come to Miss Wright's as a parlour boarder. She will have a fortune; and her friends have placed her at Miss Wright's till she is old enough to be introduced into company. She looks quite old enough for that now; but she is really only just fifteen, though I am sure any one might take her for eighteen, she is so large and tall."

"Indeed!" said Juliet.

"And," continued Eliza, "she is so handsomely dressed, and has such fine ornaments, and she has such a beautiful little gold watch!"

"Did she dance?" inquired Juliet.

"Yes," replied Eliza, "and she dances very well. She never seemed at all at a loss, though she was among so many strangers, but went on without appearing to notice any one. I thought she looked unhappy; but I am sure she is very good-tempered, for one of those awkward little Grays pushed me against her, when we were practising the last exercise, and I trod on her dress and tore it."

"How unlucky!" exclaimed Juliet.

"I was very much vexed at first," said Eliza, "and begged her pardon; but I was almost glad afterwards, for she replied so pleasantly, and told me it was not of the least consequence; and when I was coming away she held out her hand to shake hands with me."

"How very kind!" said Juliet.

"I like her exceedingly," said Eliza; "and I am sure every one admired her. I dare say she has a great deal of pocket-money."

"No doubt she has, if she is rich," said Juliet.

"Oh, yes! she is to have a large fortune, and it is to please her that Miss Wright has this party."

"Did Miss Wright say so?" asked Juliet.

"I do not know that she said so herself," replied Eliza, "but one or two of the big girls say that they are sure that is the reason; for Miss Wright wants to make it pleasant to the young lady, and have her willing to stay."

"I do not mind the reason," said Juliet, "so as there is the party, and we are allowed to go. What day is it to be?"

"This day fortnight," replied Eliza. "It is the anniversary of Miss Wright's coming to Riverton; she has been here just one-and-twenty years; and she gives out that she has this party to commemorate the event, and show her gratitude for the kind support she has received, by giving a little treat to her pupils. It would not do, you know, to show favouritism."

"Of course not," replied Juliet. "What is the young lady's name?"

"Bell," replied Eliza; "Emily Bell. What a sweet name Emily is!"

"Where does she come from?" again inquired Juliet.

"I am not certain as to the name of the place," replied Eliza; "but it is a very long way off. Meggy Probin says——there is no one can hear us, is there?" said Eliza, rising up and looking round.

"Oh! no," said Juliet, "there is no one near; we are quite alone. What does Meggy Probin say? she is a great gossip."

"Yes," said Eliza; "she finds out everything about everybody. Well, she says that Miss Bell had been making acquaintance that she should not, and that her friends sent her to Riverton to be out of the way. Meggy says, too—I am sure I cannot tell how she knew it—that Emily Bell's friends have requested Miss Wright to watch very carefully over the young

you must ask him, I should not dare. He would be much more willing to grant you a favour than me; for he has not been angry with you for many days."

"I will certainly take the task upon myself," said Matilda; "but let me advise you, dear Juliet, in the mean time, to be very attentive to all papa says, and try not to forget anything that he tells you to do."

"I will do my very best," said Juliet; "when will you ask papa?"

"We have not had our invitation yet," said Matilda smiling.

Juliet was not wrong when she said Mr. Lonsdale had been far more gentle in his manner towards Matilda of late. In point of fact, he had been so towards all his children; but this change did not appear to arise from kinder feelings, but seemed the result of indifference. He was gloomy and abstracted. In vain Matilda tried all her most winning ways to gain her papa's attention, and revive in him that affection which had made her so happy on a recent occasion. His thoughts seemed wholly pre-occupied; and he took no further notice of his daughter than to issue his orders, and occasionally inquire if they had been attended to.

This state of things was exceedingly painful to Matilda, for she was of a most affectionate nature, and it was hardly possible for her to live with any one without her attachment being awakened. With regard to her father, she had once most tenderly loved him; and had she been questioned on the subject now, she would have answered with perfect truth and simplicity, that she did so still. His harshness and unkindness pained her exceedingly; but he had only to be to her what he formerly was, to call forth anew her warmest and most devoted love.

That she had become exceedingly afraid of him, she could not deny to herself; and had she alone been

concerned, she would have preferred foregoing any pleasure to be derived from Miss Wright's proposed party, than have to ask his permission to go. But her sister was concerned in the matter, and she engaged to do for her what she would not have done for herself alone.

Matilda was truly amiable. She possessed those qualities which are most valuable and endearing in the female sex. Though firm in principle, she was yielding in little matters; not apt to contest about trifles, and ready to give up in small things her wish or her way, when persisting in it might have produced something unpleasant. When reproved, she was not in haste to justify herself, but reflected whether she did not deserve what was said. Her answers were pleasant, and she could bear to be questioned two or three times over without saying, "I have told you so before," or, "I have said the same thing ten times." She never contradicted rudely; and, when it was necessary to oppose what was said, she asserted her opinion with modesty and gentleness.

These are all trifles; there is nothing great or heroic about them: but certain it is, that behaviour like Matilda's greatly conduced to the comfort of those with whom she lived.

Life is made up of moments; and as each moment brings with it its amount of gratification or annoyance, such will be the sum of days and of years. It has been well said that happiness is a mosaic, consisting of numerous small pieces; and small though they be, each one goes to complete a figure, which would be imperfect if any were left out.

But to return to Matilda. Such as has just been described was this young girl at the present time, and when she was still at the early age of fourteen and a half. On circumstances must depend whether or not she would grow up the same estimable character. She had sustained in the death of her exemplary mother

the severest loss that could befall her. She was neglected by her sole surviving parent, and, at an age when she might naturally be supposed to be very incompetent, she was placed at the head of an establishment which, small though it was, required peculiar management; added to all which, she was charged with the education of two young children, and an injunction solemnly bequeathed to her, that she would diligently persevere in her own studies.

It might appear at first sight, that Matilda laboured under peculiar disadvantages; but this was not the case. She had been prepared in a great measure by her late mother for many of the duties which devolved upon her. Even before Mrs. Lonsdale's illness, she had turned the attention of her daughters to domestic affairs; and from a very early age, she had accustomed them to be useful in the family. Without interfering with the studies and accomplishments befitting young ladies, Matilda and Juliet learned to perform and to superintend many little operations in the kitchen; the want of a knowledge of which in the mistress of a family often causes not only waste, but a great want of comfort.

As regarded Mr. Lonsdale, perhaps the very things about him which caused Matilda so much pain, were not unsalutary. The constant efforts she made to restrain anything like petulance or ill-humour in all her transactions with him, and the strenuous efforts she made to please him and win back his former affection, were not without producing beneficial effects on her character.

The task of teaching the younger children had, too, its advantages; for, besides exercising her in patience, the juvenile lessons kept many useful things alive in her memory, which might otherwise have escaped her. And as regarded her own individual studies and pursuits, there was a sacredness attached to the duty of persevering in them, that operated to enforce more

diligence even than might have been the case if the dear monitress had been present to dictate the daily employments. But above all, Matilda had been brought up in the fear and love of God. She had been taught to place reliance on Him, and to pray unceasingly that He would have her in His holy keeping, and guide and direct her through all the trials and temptations of life.

CHAPTER VI.

An Invitation arrives. Suspense. Consent. Miss Bell's new Dress. Miss Moore's interesting Intelligence. A good Habit. Dressing for the Party. The lost Shoe. Late Arrival. Decorations of the School-room. Caprice. Mortifications. School Girls' Flattery. Finished young Ladies. A faithless Friend. Supper. Miss Fagley. Music. Juliet's Song. Mysterious Transaction. The Happiness which can be depended upon.

Miss Wright's invitation to the Misses Lonsdale duly arrived; but the note was locked up in Matilda's desk several days, before she had the courage to show it to her papa.

Juliet was all impatience, but she thought with her sister it was better to wait for a "fortunate moment to present it;" but the fortunate moment did not arrive, and Juliet was in despair, when, one morning after breakfast, she came running to her sister and said,—

"Papa has just received a letter which seems to have given him a little gratification; at any rate, he did not frown and throw it down as he sometimes does; do come now and show him Miss Wright's note, and beg him to let us accept her invitation."

Matilda complied with her sister's request; but the colour forsook her cheeks as she entered the room where Mr. Lonsdale was sitting, and put the note into his hands. With a beating heart she awaited his answer.

Mr. Lonsdale opened the note, and after reading it, returned it to Matilda with an abstracted air, as if he had not attended to its contents.

"May we go, papa?" timidly inquired Matilda.

Mr. Lonsdale took back the note, and re-read it. "An invitation to Miss Wright's, at the school," said

he; then looking at Matilda, as he again returned the note, he continued, "a party, dancing, I suppose? you are too ill to go to a party."

"Oh no! dear papa; I am not at all ill," cried Matilda, as the colour rushed back to her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with the hope that her request would be granted.

Mr. Lonsdale again fixed his eyes for a moment on his daughter, and then said, "You may go if you like."

Matilda flew to communicate the success of her embassy to Juliet, who remained up stairs, alternately hoping and fearing for the result.

"How glad I am," said Juliet, "that papa has given his consent for us to go! we have been so confined of late, that it will be a double treat to get into a little company."

"Yes, that is the thing," replied her sister, "that makes us care about this visit so much. Formerly, we did not think half so much of being prevented from joining in any amusement, as we should do now, were we to be disappointed."

"Whatever is the cause," said Juliet, gaily, "I seldom have anticipated so much pleasure from any entertainment as I do from this. There will be so much to amuse; and then I shall so like to see Miss Bell! I feel quite curious about her. I wish I could see Eliza Moore, to hear if she has anything more to tell; I dare say that by this time she knows all about the party,—who is to be there, and what is to be done."

"This is dancing-day," said Matilda; "and Eliza will be at Miss Wright's to take her lesson."

"So she will," cried Juliet; "and she must pass by our house on her return home. I will run and watch at the window to see if I can catch sight of her, and call her in. Papa is gone out; I heard the door shut while we were talking; so she can come in, and have a long chat. I know she will be longing to tell me all she knows about the party. Eliza is very entertaining! I love her better and better every time I see her."

Juliet posted herself at the window below; and as it was about the time that the dancing-lesson terminated, she had not long to wait before her friend appeared in sight. Juliet tapped at the window and beckoned; and Eliza ran smiling in, and pleasantly accosted the sisters. The visiter had much to tell of the news she had picked up at the dancing-school, and among the young ladies in the town; and she soon made her listeners as wise as herself respecting the arrangements of the party, and who was to be invited, and what was to go forward on the eventful evening.

Juliet made some particular inquiries respecting Miss Wright's new pupil, and asked if she had been dancing that morning.

Eliza replied that, to her great disappointment, Miss Bell had not made her appearance. It was said that she was indisposed; but it was hinted among some of the most sagacious of the scholars, that she was not really ill, but low-spirited.

"This party," continued Eliza, "will rouse her, and do her good, no doubt; for she has ordered a new dress for the occasion. Directly she heard of it, she wrote home to ask leave to have a new dress, although the girls say she has so many beautiful ones already. This will be splendid; Mr. Glossop sent to London on purpose for the silk. It is such a lovely colour, and so expensive, though I forget exactly how much it is a yard. Miss Fripp has got it to make; and she is allowed to trim it as expensively as she pleases."

"What colour is it?" inquired Juliet; and hearing that it was something between lilac and peach-blossom, but so indescribably delicate in tint, that it was impossible to give an accurate idea of it, Juliet ran up stairs to fetch some patterns of silks which had been given her, to see if any one among them could convey a notion of the hue of Miss Bell's beautiful robe.

While Juliet was away, Eliza said, with something nearly approaching a sigh, that she feared Miss Bell's

splendid dress would make her own blue tarleton look very poor.

Matilda suggested that she might wear pink.

"That would look brighter, certainly," said Eliza; "I think I will wear my pink frock. You and Juliet, I suppose, will be dressed in black and white."

"Such is my sister's wish," replied Matilda; "for myself, I should prefer wearing our black frocks."

"Black frocks in such a gay party?" exclaimed Eliza, in surprise. "Pray do not go such old frights in your black frocks."

Matilda was a little startled at this expression; but she thought Eliza's mind might be so occupied with the party, that she had not considered exactly what she said, or it might be that she was anxious for the advantageous appearance of her especial friend Juliet; but, be that as it may, she made no reply, and in a very short time forgot that the expression had ever been used.

Juliet brought down her patterns, and after they had been duly examined and discussed, Eliza mentioned the names of all those whom she heard were invited, and told of a large ham that was ordered from Mr. Bacon's, and of the milk and cream that was bespoken, and of the number of couples of fowls that Mr. Oats was to send from his farm, informing her hearers, at the same time, that the ham was for sandwiches for the young ladies, and the chickens for the parlour supper; for that Miss Wright had invited the vicar and his lady, and Mr. and Mrs. Knight, that is, if Mr. Knight could get away from his business, and Captain Holt and his old mother, and Mrs. Turner. The three last-named persons, it was thought, would not have been asked, only they had been the means of sending two or three new scholars to Miss Wright. Mrs. Turner's company, especially, was not very desirable, for she always would have her children, a boy and a girl, with her, wherever she was; and Miss Wright did not want her supper-table crowded with two

children, particularly with the boy, who was a "fat greedy little thing of six years old."

Miss Turner was decided to be, by Eliza, "a conceited, disagreeable girl," and pronounced, by Juliet, to be "exceedingly spoilt by her mamma."

"Miss Bell," continued Eliza, running on, "has had her choice, whether she will sup on chickens in the parlour, with the grown-up part of the company, or eat sandwiches with the girls in the school-room; and she has decided to do the latter."

"How very kind!" exclaimed Juliet.

"And so condescending," said Eliza.

"Where are the teachers to sup?" inquired Matilda.

"The French teacher," replied Eliza, "is to sup in the parlour, and the English in the school-room. Miss Wright is very kind, and would have paid them both the compliment of inviting them to join the parlour company; but one must be with the girls. So, as Mademoiselle Fleury has been the longest in the establishment, she has the preference; and besides which, it is best that the English teacher, Miss Fagley, should be with the girls to keep order; not that I think there will be any want of order among them on such an occasion."

"Oh no!" cried Juliet; "I have no doubt but that everything will go on well, and that we shall have a delightful evening; how I do anticipate the pleasure of it! And you and I, Eliza, will dance a great deal together; and we shall all be so happy, I know."

"Well, I really must go now," said Eliza, rising; "grandmamma will wonder what has become of me. I hope she will not be cross with me for staying out so long. I must run, and put her in good humour, for I want to coax her into buying me a new frock. Since I have been sitting here, I have been thinking that mine will look very shabby!"

"What a nice girl she is!" exclaimed Juliet, as her friend ran off and closed the door behind her; "much

as I expect from this party, I think the largest half of my pleasure will be dancing and sitting with her, and seeing and enjoying everything together."

Miss Moore might with truth be called a very pleasant girl; she was lively, clever, and entertaining, and, generally speaking, very good-humoured, added to which, she had a very winning and engaging manner; she had no sister; and perhaps it was owing to this that she was given to form very warm and sudden friendships for any young ladies who took her fancy.

Her mamma had long been dead, and since that event she had resided with her paternal grandmamma, —a lady whose time was very much occupied in attending meetings for the spread of knowledge among the heathen, assisting at lectures on the best mode of benefiting mankind at home and abroad, in forming new rules and regulations for the advantage of the poor, and other important matters of the same kind.

On first coming to Riverton, two or three months back, Eliza Moore had taken a great fancy to Juliet; and in the course of a few meetings, this sentiment ripened into a friendship of the warmest kind. She thought and said no one was equal to Juliet, and that she had never before loved any one half so much.

Juliet, who was of a very affectionate nature, and not insensible to the distinction of being selected from all others, to be the "bosom friend" of so charming a young lady, reciprocated this attachment, and was never happier than when in the company of Miss Moore.

The selecting Juliet for a friend did more credit to Miss Moore's judgment than the choice of some of her former favourites had done; for though Juliet was nearly two years younger, her attainments were, generally speaking, of a higher order, and she had greater solidity of character than Miss Moore.

At last the day anticipated with so much pleasure by the juvenile inhabitants of Riverton arrived.

Mrs. Lonsdale, among other good habits to which she had accustomed her daughters, had taught them, whenever they were going out on a visit, or to receive company at home, to lay out in the morning the dress and everything else they would want to wear in the evening.

Miss Wright had invited her juvenile friends for six o'clock, soon after which hour Mr. Ball was to arrive. Juliet, who had been in a state of excitement all day, was very anxious to be dressed in good time, and called to her elder sister several times, before Matilda thought it necessary to commence her toilette.

Matilda was telling Rupert and Kate a little tale, to amuse them before she quitted them for the evening, when Juliet summoned her the last time.

"Do come," said the impatient girl; "I want to be at the very beginning of the party."

"It is only five o'clock now," replied Matilda, "and we have plenty of time; still, as you wish it so much, I will come now;" and putting Kate down from her knee, where she had been sitting, she followed Juliet up stairs, telling the child, as she did so, that she would finish the story when she was dressed.

The sisters had not been long in their room before Juliet, in an anxious tone, called out that she could not find one of her dancing-shoes.

"Where can it be?" said she. "Do, dear Matilda, help me look. I have been hunting for it everywhere, ever since I came up stairs."

"Did you not lay out your shoes with the rest of your dress, in the morning?" asked Matilda.

"I only saw one of my shoes then; but I laid that out," replied Juliet, getting very uneasy as she looked; and her sister looked about without the missing shoe appearing.

Matilda suggested that the maid perhaps knew of it, and she called up Harriet.

But Harriet knew nothing of the shoe; and only

kept repeating as she turned over the contents of the drawers, and rummaged in the closets, that—

"It was a pity Miss Juliet did not find her other shoe at the time, and lay them both together."

"Do not keep on saying that, Harriet," cried Juliet, petulantly. "You have said it twenty times already. I am sure somebody must have done something or other with my shoe. Do search in your drawers again, Matilda, perhaps you have overlooked it."

"I know it is of no use," said Matilda; "it is a most unlikely place for it to be in; still I will move everything again;" and the obliging girl emptied her drawers a second time.

The clock on the stairs struck the half-hour past five.

"Oh dear, dear!" exclaimed Juliet; "half-past five, and I have not even begun to dress. The party will be half over before we get there."

"Oh no, dear!" said Matilda, soothingly; "we shall find the shoe in time—"

At this moment Kate entered the room, to see what had detained her elder sister so long from coming to finish the history of "The Good Little Girl and her Brother Charles;" and learning the reason, she said to Juliet—

"Your shoe is among your writing."

"Nonsense, child!" said Juliet, angrily; for she thought Kate was laughing at her on account of her careless habits.

"It is there," said Rupert, who had followed the little girl upstairs: "I saw you gather it up with your books and writing, and lay them all together on your shelf, when you were going out in a hurry yesterday afternoon."

Juliet flew to the spot, and there most assuredly was her dancing-shoe, laid up amongst her exercises and lesson-books.

Restored to comparative comfort, she kissed her little sister, and sending her and Rupert out of the room, the toilette of herself and Matilda proceeded without further interruptions; but as might be expected, the sisters did not arrive at Miss Wright's till somewhat later than Matilda intended, and very much later than Juliet wished.

On entering the cloak-room, piles of shawls and bonnets gave notice that most, if not all of the company, was assembled; and the sound of Mr. Ball's violin issuing from the school-room, warned Juliet, unpleasantly, that the dancing was begun, and that they had lost some of the amusement.

Miss Wright gave her young friends a kind welcome, and on Matilda's saying she was afraid she and her sister were late, she good-naturedly replied, that the quadrille then being danced was only the first.

Matilda and Juliet had time to look about, and they admired the decorations of the room, which was tastefully hung with lilacs and laburnums, together with a mixture of evergreens and the monthly-blowing rose. But Juliet's attention was not long diverted from the dancers. She looked first for her friend Eliza Moore, and then sought to discover the new and important feature of the evening; namely, Miss Wright's recently-arrived parlour boarder. There were several fresh scholars since Juliet had attended the dancing-school; but she had no difficulty in immediately deciding in her own mind which of the girls was Miss Bell. And from the description Eliza Moore had given, this was not a difficult task; for as Juliet's eyes wandered round the room in search of the young lady, they immediately rested upon a tall full-formed girl, attired in a costly silk dress, and loaded with a profusion of expensive ornaments.

Poor Miss Wright would fain have had her pupil more simply dressed, but she saw the young lady's weak point, and, acting according to orders, " to make

everything as pleasant as possible," she did not contest the matter.

Matilda and Juliet, as they looked at Miss Bell, thought her dress inappropriate for a school-girl, and so did several others of the company.

When the quadrille was over, Mr. Ball called out immediately, "Polka Mazurka," and began playing Marc Burty's exceedingly pretty music. Miss Bell had not been dancing, but she now stood up with the French governess. Mademoiselle Fleury danced beautifully, and the couple were much admired. Miss Moore had danced the quadrille with Miss Bloxam, a lady-like girl, daughter of a major in the army.

Juliet concluded that, directly the quadrille was finished, Eliza would have hastened up to her to ask her to dance; but she was mistaken, for her friend kept the same partner.

Juliet felt a little annoyed, but she thought perhaps Eliza had not seen her come in, or that perhaps she was obliged to dance again with Miss Bloxam, or that the polka had followed so immediately on the previous dance, that there was hardly any time for choice of partners.

Matilda asked Juliet if she would like to dance with her; and as there was no one else to dance with, except some little girls who were sitting out, she accepted her sister's offer. While pausing to rest a few moments in the dance, Eliza and her partner passed close to the spot where the sisters were standing; Juliet held out her hand to her friend, which Eliza took.

"Will you dance with me next?" said Juliet, eagerly; but before she could hear the reply, a twirl in the dance carried Eliza out of speaking reach.

"Who are those young ladies in half-mourning?" inquired Miss Bell of Mademoiselle Fleury; "are they Lady Cecilia Manbey's daughters?"

"Lady Cecilia Manbey's daughters are not here," replied the French governess in her native language.

"I thought Miss Wright was going to invite them," said Miss Bell.

"*Pardon*," replied Mademoiselle Fleury; "Miss Wright only mentioned their names, when speaking of the young ladies in the neighbourhood."

"Who are those girls, then?" said Miss Bell.

"Their name is Lonsdale," answered the French governess.

"And their papa," again inquired Miss Bell, determined to ascertain something about Matilda and Juliet, whom she had been attentively regarding for some time, "who and what is Mr. Lonsdale?"

"Monsieur Lonsdale est un avoué," was the answer.

"*Un avoué*," repeated Miss Bell; "*avoué* answers to our word attorney; does it not?"

Mademoiselle Fleury nodded her head in token of assent; and Miss Bell immediately withdrew her eyes from the sisters.

The dance ended; the Grahams, Rose Vernon, and two or three other friends of the Lonsdales, hastened up to speak to them.

"How late you were!" said Louisa Graham to Juliet, after a little conversation had passed between them; "I was afraid you were not coming—but see! there is another quadrille forming; will you dance with me?"

"I believe," said Juliet, "I am engaged; I expect—" she hesitated, and looked anxiously round to see if Eliza was coming to her; but, to her surprise and mortification, she saw her capricious friend leading out Miss Bell, and taking her place at the top of the first quadrille.

"That quadrille is formed," said Louisa; "we had better go down lower, that is," continued she, good-naturedly, "if you will like me for a partner?"

"Very much," answered Juliet, hurriedly; and she suffered Louisa to lead her away.

A polka, and then another quadrille followed; in

both of which Miss Bell was still Eliza's partner. In the latter dance, Juliet happened to be Eliza's *vis à vis*.

This arrangement was not of Juliet's seeking: the set was formed by Mr. Ball. Some of the grown-up part of the guests were at this time in the school-room, to see the dancing; and Mr. Ball, anxious for his fame, called his best pupils to the top of the room; and of this select number were the Lonsdales.

But it signified little who danced opposite to Eliza, for her whole attention was wrapped up in Miss Bell, and whose regard she appeared most anxious to win. Once, indeed, she seemed aware of Juliet's vicinity; for, in standing beside her for a few moments in one of the figures, she said, in an under tone,—

"How tiresome of grandmamma! she would not let me have a new dress; but," added she, looking across at her partner, "it does not signify; for Miss Bell dances with me more than with any one else."

These few brief words were all that passed between the two quondam friends, till the dancing was over.

As soon as Mr. Ball had made his final bow, and the lookers-on had retired, a party of the elder scholars gathered round Miss Bell, and paid her that sort of adulatory attention which silly weak-minded school-girls are too apt to bestow on any of their companions who may possess the accidental advantages of wealth, station, or personal attractions. Miss Bell's expensive attire, and the reports concerning her fortune, made her appear a person of much consequence to Miss Wright's pupils. She had, besides, a sort of nónchalante air when she was complimented, as much as to say that she was aware of how fully entitled she was to the encomiums bestowed on her, which greatly enhanced her importance in the eyes of her flatterers.

Hitherto, either from the state of her spirits or from being among strangers, Miss Bell had preserved a sort of distance towards her companions, which had checked any approaches towards familiar intercourse; but on

the present evening, her manners were sufficiently condescending to encourage any attempts the young ladies might feel inclined to make to propitiate her favour.

The first point of attack was through the medium of the self-important young lady's attire. One said her dress was the loveliest colour ever seen; another, that its texture was of the richest kind; another, that the trimmings were in exquisite taste. One young lady who had very fine hair herself, praised the manner in which Miss Bell had arranged hers; another admired her ear-rings; and another, more daring than the rest, laid hold of one of her bracelets to examine it more closely, and pronounced that it must have cost "a world of money!"

Her dancing, her manners, her carriage, all next came in for a large quota of admiration; the object of this flattery meanwhile either faintly smiling, or now and then gently disclaiming the praises so lavishly bestowed on her.

Some allusion was made by one of the girls to a friend of hers, who was seventeen.

"Seventeen!" repeated Miss Bell; "oh, how I wish that I was seventeen!"

"Why?" said Matilda Lonsdale, who, with Rose Vernon and the eldest Miss Graham, had been amusing themselves at a little distance, with this scene,—"Why do you wish you were seventeen?"

"Why do I wish it!" said Miss Bell, surprised that any one should not have an intuitive knowledge on such a subject; "why, of course, because I shall then be finished, and shall be introduced!"

"Finished, in what way?" asked Rose Vernon, while her companions turned away to hide a smile.

Miss Bell did not condescend to answer so absurd a question, but putting her arm through Eliza Moore's, walked away to another part of the room, ejaculating, in an under tone, "What strange ignorance!"

Juliet had also been observing what was passing;

but her feelings were too painfully excited to allow of her deriving any amusement from what she saw. Her mind was absorbed by one engrossing subject,—that of being forsaken by her own dear and intimate friend for a mere stranger.

Eliza never for an instant quitted the side of Miss Bell, nor for a moment withdrew her attention from her. Juliet saw her late friend bestowing on this stranger the same affectionate regard, putting forth the same engaging manner, and exerting the same power to please, which she had used towards herself when her friendship was eagerly sought, and when Eliza had declared that she never could, would, or should love any one else as she did her.

That Eliza should like to talk to Miss Bell, and be pleased to dance with her, Juliet was not so unreasonable as not to think natural; but that she should suffer herself to be so wholly engrossed by her, to the exclusion of all former friends, she did indeed think most surprising. It really seemed as if Eliza was not aware she was by, or, if she was conscious of her presence, it was only to notice her in the most cold and indifferent manner.

Such behaviour was most unkind. Juliet knew she had done nothing to deserve it; on the contrary, she had never felt more affectionately towards Eliza; and she had looked forward to being with her and enjoying the pleasures of the evening together, as the happiest part of the entertainment. Besides which, she had told Eliza that they would dance a great deal with one another; and she had not even asked her once.

The evening proving showery, the young ladies could not walk in the garden; but there was no want of amusement within doors. There were work and books, and drawings to look at, and a great many amusing games to play at. There was a great deal of laughing, and joking, and talking; and the time passed rapidly and pleasantly away with most of the youthful party.

In the midst of one of the merriest and noisiest of the games, there was a sudden hush; for Miss Fagley, mounted on a chair at the top of the room, called out "Silence!" and when attention was gained, she requested that the young ladies would move to the farther end of the room, and make way for the entrance of supper.

Space being obtained, the servants entered and placed on a table at the top of the room, trays, containing various kinds of refreshments. First, there were three or four very large plum cakes; then there were the ham-sandwiches, which Eliza Moore,—unkind Eliza Moore, had told Juliet of. Poor Juliet! she had no appetite. But there were the sandwiches,—delicate in their appearance, and piled up in dishes, in such abundance, as if the liberal Miss Wright had considered that her young friends had been suffering from a famine. Then there was a profusion of oranges and apples, and an abundant supply of almonds and raisins. Lastly were deposited on a side-table together with a tray of mugs, two enormous bowls of negus: white wine and red wine negus, made with plenty of sugar and nutmeg, and smoking hot,—the very smell of it was delicious!

All being ready, Miss Fagley, with the assistance of the servants and half-boarders, contrived to preserve tolerable order while she distributed the viands. But when each young lady was desired to bring up her mug for negus, "to drink Miss Wright's health;" either from zeal to do honour to the toast, or eagerness to obtain the unusual luxury, it must be owned that there was something very like a scramble among the pupils, and a pushing before the visiters, that was not altogether quite becoming.

Miss Fagley called to order, and said she hoped on such an occasion, "ladies would act with perfect decorum;" and ever and anon, as she continued ladling out her tempting mixture, her voice was heard amidst the din of tongues, and clatter of mugs, crying out,

"pray, ladies;" "do ladies;" "on such an occasion."

It was an arduous undertaking, the attending to so many claimants, and taking care that no one among the more retiring of the throng was not left out; but Miss Fagley got through it as teachers at a school get through work—far harder work than this.

During supper, some of the visiters divided themselves into little parties, chatting and talking together, and amusing themselves with the busy scene. The Lonsdales, Grahams, and Miss Vernon, formed a set, but, unfortunately for Juliet's comfort, they were placed just opposite Miss Bell and a select few; among this number, it is hardly necessary to say, was Miss Moore, who, regardless of her own ease and comfort, devoted herself to her new friend, being engaged in constantly fetching and carrying whatever she thought was nicest and best of the treat—the young lady, meanwhile, receiving all these attentions with the air of a queen.

After supper, music was proposed. There was a tolerably good pianoforte in the school-room, which Miss Wright had had transported there for the evening, in order that the young ladies might amuse themselves with it if they felt inclined.

Several of the girls sat down to sing and play, but there was such a buzz of tongues, such laughter and noise in every part of the room, that except for the individual gratification of the performers themselves, their music gave little pleasure. One or two of the Lonsdales' intimate acquaintance, who had often heard Juliet, begged her to sing; but feeling little disposed she at first excused herself, but finding that further refusal would be disobliging, she consented, and Matilda sat down to accompany her. Juliet's voice was powerful and very sweet, and her ringing bell-like notes were distinctly heard in the furthest corners of the spacious room. There was an imme-

diate lull in the busy throng, and troop upon troop of the girls crowded round the instrument to listen.

The song Juliet sang, was entitled "Friendship;" the words were good, and she pronounced them distinctly, while she rendered the music with taste and feeling.

The song was Eliza Moore's favourite; and as Juliet concluded, she turned and looked towards her faithless friend, not without a hope that she had been at least listened to. But she was doomed to disappointment, for apparently, Eliza and her companion, Miss Bell, had not even been conscious that music was going forward, for they were sitting with their heads leaned forward close together, and were conversing with such earnestness, that they made no change in their position when the singing ceased, and their conference was only interrupted by the breaking up of the party.

Miss Bell followed Eliza to the cloaking room, where, amidst affectionate leave-takings, the former young lady removed an expensive brooch from her dress, and giving it to her "dear Eliza," told her to wear it for her sake. Eliza thanked her "dearest Emily" with an affectionate embrace, at the same time that a paper was cautiously slipped into her hand. It was evident that the utmost secrecy was intended to be preserved in this transaction by both parties, but Juliet, who was watching the two girls with painful emotions, and whose perceptions were perhaps quickened by the nature of her own feelings, detected it, and furthermore, that the paper was nothing less than a letter directed and stamped for the post-office.

Mrs. Turner, who had sent for a Fly, in consequence of her little boy being unwell from over-eating —cold, his mother said—offered to set Matilda and Juliet down at their own door, which she passed on her way home.

Matilda accepted the obliging offer, and thus ended the evening of "Miss Wright's anniversary."

No sooner was Juliet removed from the presence of all witnesses, save her kind sister, than her wrought-up feelings found vent in a violent burst of tears, and for full an hour after she had entered her bed-room, she engaged Matilda in a long discussion upon the events of the painful evening.

Matilda entered fully into Juliet's feelings as to the capricious treatment she had been subjected to by Eliza, and tried all in her power to console her sister and soothe her agitated feelings; but Juliet, who was of an ardent and affectionate nature, was greatly mortified, and her pride was too severely wounded for her to derive much benefit from Matilda's words and sympathy; and she repeated many times:

"Who would have thought that a day which I anticipated with so much pleasure, and which I thought was to afford me so much enjoyment, would have turned out in this manner?"

Poor Juliet! She had had but little experience of life and its joys, and had yet to learn that the only pleasures which can be looked forward to with any certainty as to a happy result, are those which arise from having conferred a benefit upon a fellow-creature; or when, after a long and powerful struggle, we gain a victory over ourselves, resist the temptation to do wrong, and resolutely pursue the path of duty.

CHAPTER VII.

Reflections after the Party. Conceit. Vanity. Lady-like Deportment. Desire to show off. Mortification. Good Advice. Walk to Broomheath. Conversation between the Sisters. Sudden Friendship. Grateful Praise. An estimable Character. Toiling with the Needle. Trepidation. An entertaining Companion. Love of Gossip. Gentle Reproof.

MATILDA was very tired when at last she retired to rest, and her mind so distracted with the events of the evening, and especially with that one which caused her sister so much pain, that she fell asleep before she had half thought over all that had passed. But on the following morning, as she quietly went about performing her small household duties, all the occurrences of the previous evening came in review before her. Her first thought, as regarded herself, was, that she had spent a very pleasant time. She had enjoyed the companionship of several very agreeable girls, she had engaged in a gentle and graceful exercise — dancing, of which she was fond; she had joined in several merry games, and last of all, she had derived no inconsiderable entertainment from witnessing the actions of others and hearing their conversation. The share which Miss Bell had in affording this amusement has been already spoken of.

There is a great deal in a girls' school to call forth reflection in a meditative mind, and, perhaps, few better opportunities for observation are afforded to a speculator on juvenile character, than a "dancing day."

Conceit, love of dress, and a desire to shine are, on this occasion, very conspicuous in the vain and foolish. While others, of a different stamp, are striving to acquire a graceful carriage and ladylike deportment,

at the same time that, inspirited by lively music, they are in the enjoyment of a healthful exercise.

In both classes, the work of the mother is apparent. In the one, the child is reared in the notion that outward appearance, finery, and showy accomplishments, are the grand objects in life; while in the other, all adornment and graces of person and manner, are to be looked upon as we regard the setting of a valuable painting, which painting should not be disfigured by anything ugly and inappropriate about it.

Several of the girls at Miss Wright's party, more particularly among the visiters, had attracted Matilda's attention, and she watched with a feeling nearly amounting to surprise, the airs and graces, the confidence and assurance among some of these young aspirants for fame and notice. But among them all, perhaps the most conspicuous was little Miss Turner. Brought up by her mamma to think herself a person of great importance, and dressed in a gay and expensive style, she pushed before her seniors, and forced her way into all the first situations in the dances. Two or three of the elder girls tried to remove her lower down, but she looked at her mamma, who was sitting by watching her with admiring eyes, and then at her expensive dress, and stoutly resisted all attempts to make her change her place.

Mr. Ball, who had children of his own, remarked and disapproved of this girl's behaviour, and he determined to mortify her. In the course of his lessons, he had taught Miss Turner and another little girl, Miss Bliss, a very pretty *pas seul*, and while the elder of his pupils were taking a rest after a long continuance of dancing, he thought it would make a pleasing variety for the lookers on, to have this dance performed.

Choosing a moment when every one was seated, Mr. Ball advanced into the middle of the room, and after drawing up a string which had got flat, he gave

two or three sharp raps with his bow on his violin, in the well-known manner in which he called attention preparatory to a fresh dance. He then played the first bars of the air to which the *pas seul* was danced, and looked towards Miss Turner. Immediately, her heart beat with expectation, and she experienced a thrill of delight, at the thought of exhibiting herself alone before all the company. She started up, and had made a step or two in advance, when Mr. Ball, continuing the air, turned round, and called upon Miss Bliss from the bottom of the room where she was sitting, hid from sight by her older companions.

The little girl thus called upon came forward, and went through her *pas seul* with apparently no other object in view than to acquit herself properly, and do justice to her dancing-master, who had kindly taken great pains in instructing her.

The dance pleased the sitters-by, and the master and pupil were both gratified with the approbation they expressed. But Miss Turner was in a state of pitiable vexation and disappointment, she sat frowning and pouting, and at last burst into tears, her mamma wiping her eyes and endeavouring to pacify her. But the young lady continuing to sob, her mamma, who did not altogether like this display of her daughter's weakness, sent her to the farther end of the room, telling her to go and invite some of her little friends to come and see her the next day.

Before going away, Mr. Ball took an opportunity of speaking to Miss Turner, and in language suited to her age, and such as he would have addressed to a child of his own, he told her of her forward and unbecoming behaviour, and impressed on her mind that if she wished for the approbation of others, she must begin by thinking humbly of herself; and that if she would learn to give place to others, she would in turn be brought forward and be better entitled to occupy the situations which she was now so ambitious of filling.

When Matilda had completed her little domestic arrangements, and attended to the instruction of her brother and younger sister, Juliet, who had been restless and uncomfortable all the morning, came to her and said, she wished she would take a walk with her.

Matilda, who did not feel very much inclined to study directly after her evening's amusement, gladly acceded to this request, and the sisters agreed to go and pay Ann a visit, and take the younger children with them. Mr. Lonsdale was from home, and though it was at an hour usually devoted to study, there did not appear any reason to prevent the young people from doing what they wished "once in a way," to quote Miss Wright's expression.

Juliet's state of mind made it very excusable that she should wish for a little relaxation; neither must Matilda be blamed that she also desired to deviate from her usual plan of study, and felt a wish for a walk after the excitement and amusement of the preceding evening.

Occasional holidays are indispensable to a healthy state of mind and body in the grown up part of the community. And a holiday, now and then, is by no means an objectionable thing for children.

After an occasional cessation from study, the mind returns to it with fresh zeal; its powers recruited and invigorated by the amusement with which it has been relaxed, provided always, that the amusement has been of an innocent kind.

On their way to Broomheath, the discourse of the sisters turned, as may be supposed, upon the events of the preceding evening; of which by far the most prominent in Juliet's mind, was the unkind behaviour of Miss Moore, indeed, for a long time, Juliet could talk of nothing else.

Matilda was too well acquainted with the art of soothing, or, perhaps, it should rather be said, her intuitive perception of what was best calculated to allay

the irritation of another's feelings, prevented her in the first instance from pointing out the unworthiness of the friend whom it cost her sister so much pain to lose. But after lamenting with Juliet that an intimacy which had been productive of great pleasure to her was at an end, she gently hinted that a person of so fickle a disposition as Eliza Moore, was not much to be regretted; that no reliance could be placed on her, and that in the choice of her friend, she was swayed by caprice, and was incapable of a real and lasting friendship. Matilda then recurred to several things in Miss Moore's character which she had before spoken of as objectionable, but which Juliet, in the heroism of friendship, either could not, or would not see.

Juliet listened to her sister, but she frequently interrupted her, by exclamations of "the sadness of losing her friend," of "the event being so sudden," and then that "Eliza should cease to care for her after the protestations of regard and everlasting friendship she had so often made." And lastly, "what was she to do without such a dear and intimate friend?"

Matilda reminded her sister of Louisa Graham: "Louisa Graham," Juliet replied, "was a very pleasant girl, but she could never be to her what Eliza had been, telling her all her secrets, and loving her beyond everyone in the world;" "besides," added Juliet very gravely; "I really believe that Louisa would as soon dance or walk with her own sister as with me."

Matilda replied, "that it was assuredly no objection that Louisa's first and best affections should be given to her sister." Juliet made no answer to this observation, and continued for some little time silent.

The sisters then talked of Miss Bell, and Matilda said, without any hesitation, that she did not like her, and that she could not help thinking that she

was a girl who would occasion her friends a good deal of trouble.

Juliet agreed with her sister, and then burst forth with:

"To be deserted by my own dearest friend for such a girl, such a compound of silly airs and affectation!"

"But she is rich," said Matilda; "and I have no doubt can make herself very agreeable when it suits her purpose."

Juliet then told of the letter which she had observed Miss Bell cautiously slip into Miss Moore's hand, and both sisters speculated upon the nature of the transaction.

Matilda suggested that it might be some interesting letter which Miss Bell, in a fit of confidential friendship, wished to show Eliza; or it might be to ask her advice how to reply to it.

But Juliet said, although she could not be certain, that she was much inclined to think that it was a letter that had not been opened, but one with the envelope fastened ready for the post.

"If that was the case," said Matilda, "Miss Bell would have given it to the servant."

"I cannot tell," replied Juliet; "but it looked very sly."

"Still there might be nothing in it," replied Matilda; "I have heard poor mamma say that girls, not very wise ones, she meant, would often make a mystery of nothing, just for the sake of appearing important."

The subject now dropped, for the sisters were arrived at Mrs. Rushton's, where Rupert and Kate had already run on, with the news that Matilda and Juliet were coming.

After a time, the conversation at the cottage again turned upon the visit to Miss Wright's, and Ann entered with as warm a feeling as if she had been herself a girl, into all the little histories of the even-

ing, and condoled with Juliet on the loss of her friend. But with her usual sagacity, the old woman observed, that such a friendship was not calculated to be durable.

"It was, my dear," observed she, "as my grandmother in old-fashioned times used to say, 'too hot to hold.'"

Then, on seeing that Juliet looked very grave and unhappy, she added, "I do not mean, my dear young lady, that you are not worthy to be very much loved, when there has been sufficient time to become acquainted with you. But this friend loved you all on a sudden, it seems, and those sudden friendships never come to anything."

"Do you really think so, Ann?" said Juliet; "it seems so very natural to take a fancy at once."

"A fancy, perhaps," said Ann; "but I have often remarked, as I have gone through life, that where there has been a steady, lasting friendship between two persons, it has grown slowly. True friendship must have time to bind it close together, and it often is a long while before people find out each other's good qualities, and whether they are suited to each other's taste."

Ann mentioned that her daughter had been to Miss Wright's the day before to assist the servants, and in consequence of that lady telling her to call in the morning, she was gone there now; and while Ann was speaking, Mrs. Thompson returned, bringing a present for her mother of half a cold fowl, and a slice or two of ham.

Mrs. Thompson said Miss Wright had inquired very particularly after her mother, and hearing she had been very ill, she sent her a little treat. Then turning to Matilda and Juliet, she added that Miss Wright had mentioned that the Miss Lonsdales had been very kind to her poor mother, and that they were very good, well-conducted young ladies.

On their way back, the girls mentioned this com-

mendation of Miss Wright's, and said it was pleasant to be well spoken of by such a worthy person.

Miss Wright was indeed, in most respects, a very superior woman. The school was by no means a first-rate one; but as far as forming the youthful character to what is good, inculcating religious principles, and implanting in the heart the seeds of probity and integrity, she would have been well placed at the head of the highest establishment in the land. She was, too, gentle in her nature, and whenever it was in her power to be so, indulgent. If Miss Wright had a fault respecting her pupils, it was that she was, perhaps, a little too confiding, not quite cautious enough, but this arose from her own worth of character—it was difficult with her to imagine wrong.

"Dear mamma," said Matilda, wishing to cheer her sister, "had a high opinion of Miss Wright, and it is pleasant to reflect that this lady thinks well of us. You are unhappy now, but the cause of your unhappiness has not arisen from anything you have done; how differently would you feel had you been guilty of any wrong conduct! Had you been false or deceitful, how very miserable you would be!"

"That is very true," replied Juliet; and Rupert coming up at the moment to say that he had discovered a bird's nest, she ran off with him, followed by her sisters, to examine the treasure.

The afternoon the sisters devoted to music, Juliet taking care to avoid playing or singing anything that had been particularly approved of by her faithless friend, Eliza. But poor Juliet very soon had a more substantial cause for sorrow than that arising from the loss of Miss Moore's friendship. Both she and her sister were severely tried by their father. After the short-lived calm that existed subsequent to Mr. Lonsdale's giving his eldest daughter permission to visit her humble friend, Ann Rushton, he became more than ever irritable and unpleasant in his manners to his children. Exceedingly unhappy

in himself, he prevented even the approach to comfort in his family. Nothing went right with him, and nothing was done to his satisfaction, besides which, he employed his daughters almost unceasingly in working for him. He required fresh sets of linen to be made, and as he was in haste to have them completed, the elder girls often sat stitching and sewing from morning till night.

One day Mr. Lonsdale produced a large quantity of material, and desired Matilda to cut out and make him half a dozen waistcoats. Matilda timidly said, that she feared that what her papa required, was beyond her power to execute; and suggested that a woman who went out to work might come and assist. To this proposal Mr. Lonsdale assented, and the sempstress was engaged to come for a brief portion of every day, taking upon her the cutting out and planning of the waistcoats.

Mrs. Rushton was of course again very much neglected; now and then, but very rarely, Matilda stole away to pay her old friend a visit, and occasionally the anxious girl contrived to despatch Juliet with a little present, always begging her sister on no account to stop long, and by so doing incur Mr. Lonsdale's displeasure. But Juliet was still thoughtless as ever, and her heedlessness was often an additional source of trouble to her sister. Notwithstanding Juliet's dread of her papa's displeasure, she would, when her attention was drawn to new objects, or her interest excited by something interesting, entirely forget her orders, or neglect some duty that it was incumbent upon her to perform. For instance, one morning when the waistcoats were still unfinished, and Mr. Lonsdale had given strict orders to have two completed before dinner, she stayed out so long as to cause her sister serious uneasiness, fearing that something amiss had happened to her. Besides which, Matilda was put into a fever of excitement lest her papa should return before the waistcoats were com-

pleted, and that she should have to encounter his double displeasure, first on account of Juliet's absence, and next at his work not being done. Matilda kept on working as hard as she could, but her cheeks were flushed and her head ached severely. Once or twice her agitation was so great, that tears forced themselves from under her eyes, and trickled down her cheeks.

At last, after three or four hours' absence, in walked Juliet with a cheerful, animated countenance. But a rapid change came over her as she looked at her sister; and the sight of her occupation instantly recalled to mind how forgetful she had been.

"Where have you been, and what have you been about, dear Juliet?" exclaimed Matilda, brushing away the tears which had again gathered in her eyes just as Juliet made her appearance.

"What have I been doing?" repeated Juliet, much concerned. "I have been walking, and been so amused, that I forgot all about home; I am very sorry."

"Well, never mind;" said Matilda, smiling good-naturedly at her sister; "if you have been pleased, it is a good thing; but do not stop to talk now, take off your bonnet, and help work as fast as you can."

"How could I be so thoughtless?" exclaimed Juliet, after she had been for some time rapidly plying her needle, "but Miss Pringle was so exceedingly entertaining, that she made me forget everything but what she was talking of."

"How came you to be walking with Miss Pringle?" asked Matilda, looking up at her sister.

"I will tell you," replied Juliet; "I had just come out of Ann's cottage, and was crossing the little heath on my way home, when who should I happen upon but Miss Pringle. She was very pleasant in her manner, and asked very kindly after all the family, and then she began a history of her own illness, and asked me to turn back a little way

with her that she might tell me about it. I could not refuse, could I?"

"I think," replied Matilda, "that you might have told the lady that you were in a hurry."

"I do not think that would have done," replied Juliet; "it would have seemed unkind not to have listened to the account of her trouble."

If Juliet had reflected, she would have remembered where kindness was first due, and have hastened home to her sister; but Juliet, though kind-hearted, was often deficient in judgment, and too apt to act upon impulse.

"After Miss Pringle," continued Juliet, "had told me all about her illness—poor soul, she must have suffered very much—she said to me, 'how very often your papa goes to London.'"

"Does he?" exclaimed Matilda.

"That was just what I said to Miss Pringle when she told me," said Juliet; "and she seemed quite surprised that I did not know where he went. She knew he went to London, because, she said, he always got into one of the London carriages on the railway. I was quite pleased to learn where papa goes, and I thought you, Matilda, would be so glad to know."

"I do not think," replied her sister, "that it is of any consequence that we should know where papa goes when he leaves us; he has a right to go wherever he pleases."

"Certainly," replied Juliet; "and I do not now think it signifies to us what place papa visits, though at the time Miss Pringle told me, I thought that it was such a good thing to know, that I consented to walk on with her."

"Miss Pringle," said Matilda, "is a very inquisitive person; did she ask any questions concerning us?"

"No," replied Juliet; "she did not talk about us, but she did of other people, and was so amusing! She told me all about the Websters' quarrel; and then, when I wanted to return home, she said she was only

just going a very little further, to leave a note at a house; and if I would go on with her, she would tell me why Mrs. Chatterton never kept her servants, and why the last went away."

"And what can it signify to us, dear Juliet," said Matilda, "what are the faults of Mrs. Chatterton's servants? We do not visit her, and if we did, I should never care to hear anything about her servants."

"But the Websters," said Juliet.

"The Websters," interrupted Matilda, "and their quarrels do not concern us; we have something better to think and talk of."

"You have no curiosity," said Juliet, half reproachfully, and half ashamed of the paltry gossip she had been amused with, while her sister was doing her share of work, and at the same time that her own absence caused her great uneasiness of mind.

"I certainly," replied Matilda, "have no curiosity on such subjects; but there is one on which I own I am very curious."

"What is that?" inquired Juliet.

"Cannot you guess?" replied Matilda; smiling somewhat archly.

"You mean," said Juliet, blushing, "that you would like to know when your sister will be a little wiser."

"Right," said Matilda; then affectionately kissing Juliet's glowing cheek, she added, "it is for your own sake, my dearest sister, that I wish you would be less thoughtless. You do not know the pain I have suffered from the dread I felt of the anger you would incur if papa had come home and found you out."

"How kind you are to me, my dear, dear sister!" exclaimed Juliet, much moved; "and how forbearing of you not to reproach me for my thoughtless conduct. I will, indeed I will, strive hard to amend; and I trust in time that I shall become far more steady and useful than I am now."

CHAPTER VIII.

Reforming bad Habits. Infant Prayer. Negative Virtue. Positive good. Matilda's little Brother and Sister. Education. Child's Power of Resisting Temptation. An obliging Daughter. Choice of Associates. Bad example. Sad change. A Christian's Trials. Efficacy of Prayer. Behaviour to Parents. Falsehood. Unhappiness on a Brother's account. Mr. Lonsdale's History. Visit to a Father's Study.

JULIET was quite in earnest respecting her promise of reformation, for she was convinced of her faults, and wished to amend them, but it takes a length of time to break through habits of long continuance, especially where there is no mother or preceptress to assist in the work. Matilda's opinion or advice often operated for a short time with Juliet; but Matilda was herself very young, being only ten months older than Juliet, and she never attempted to exercise any authority over her sister. So far from it, the elder was sometimes led into error by the younger sister; but Matilda's deviations from the right way were of short duration. Reflection and prayer soon brought her back again into the path of duty. By habit and nature she was very devout, and the act of prayer was to her a real source of consolation. Often when she was a very little child, impelled by some inward feeling, she would quit the family circle, and stealing upstairs would kneel down in the dark in her nursery, and pray, with all the energy her infant mind was capable of, that "God would make her a good child."

Juliet had been equally trained by her excellent mother in the principles of religion and virtue, but she was of a more volatile character than Matilda, and much more susceptible to outward impressions of

a worldly character than her sister. Prayer with Juliet was often more an act of duty, than a resource and comfort in times of trouble. Still she was fully impressed with the importance of religion, and voluntary deviation from its sacred duties and precepts would have shocked and distressed her.

Juliet's was a character that would require a far longer time, and much severer discipline to mould into excellence than Matilda's. Juliet was too often contented with the notion that she had done no positive wrong; while her sister was unhappy if she had not striven after active good.

Matilda possessed both moral and physical order, the one influenced her sentiments and conduct towards her fellow-creatures, while the other gave method and regularity to all her transactions.

Juliet wanted the power, or rather she did not practise it, of concentrating her thoughts on one point. She was too often desultory, heedless, and disorderly; and though she sincerely repented of her errors, she constantly relapsed into them. Thus after the walk she had taken with her gossipping neighbour, notwithstanding her sorrow and promises of amendment, she continued to get into disgrace herself, and to occasion her sister additional trouble and inconvenience.

About this time another source of vexation arose to Matilda springing from her management of her brother. Rupert, as well as Kate, received his education from Matilda, for it seemed a point on which their father never troubled himself; and had it not been for their elder sister's sense of duty, and the injunctions respecting them which she had received from her mother, these children might have been reared in total neglect and ignorance.

Rupert, as being the elder of the two, came in for a larger portion of Matilda's time and instruction. He was a tractable and amiable boy, and blessed with a sweet disposition; but like all other children he

required constant care and watchfulness, and to be kept from evil associates and bad example.

Mrs. Lonsdale, when she felt aware that she should be removed from the superintendence of her children, often among other sources of anxiety, spoke of the disadvantage it would be to her little boy, to be robbed of a mother's anxious love which would lead him in the right way, and strengthen him to withstand the numerous temptations that would meet him in his passage through life. Frequently and earnestly she implored Matilda to watch over her brother to the utmost of her power; to take every opportunity of teaching him to be just and true; to guard him from bad examples, and to fortify him with good principles against the contamination of evil.

This request, like all that emanated from the same source, was sacred in the eyes of Matilda, and she strove to the utmost of her power to fulfil the wishes and injunctions of her departed and ever-lamented mother.

Happily for the success of Matilda's undertaking, Rupert's disposition seconded her endeavours, besides which he was warmly attached to his sister. In all the plans Matilda adopted for the training of her little brother, she bore in mind the counsels of her late mother, and followed, as well as she could, the method that she had seen pursued by her. Mrs. Lonsdale had laid great stress upon a strict adherence to truth, and had taught her son to be rigidly exact and honest in all his little transactions. She early taught him the value of being to be trusted; and Matilda remembered when Rupert was between three and four years old, her giving him a paper of sugar-plums to put in his pocket, and "take care of them for mamma." The child proved he understood the importance of the trust, for at the end of a week, when Mrs. Lonsdale counted the number of sugar-plums, she found that not one had been touched by the honest little boy.

Exercises of this kind in the power of resisting temptation while a boy, makes the effort to fly from evil in the man, much more easy than those who have never tried the experiment would suppose.

Matilda had learned the Latin grammar herself, and she began it with Rupert; he read English well; could write tolerably for a child of his age, was expert at figures, and could point out the principal towns and rivers in the map of Europe, and was altogether pretty well advanced in the rudiments of education.

Matilda having found the advantage of repetition days in her own education, often examined her brother on all he had learned. One morning that she was engaged with him in this exercise, at the same time that she availed herself of his services to hold a skein of silk for her to wind, Mr. Lonsdale entered the room.

Everything had gone even worse than usual with that gentleman on the day in question, nothing had pleased him, nothing had even satisfied him, and he now appeared before his eldest daughter with a more dissatisfied aspect than common. In his hand he held a handkerchief, which he wanted to have immediately made; at the same time he brought forward some work that he considered badly done. Matilda, with her customary sweetness of temper, listened to all her papa had to tell her, promising to perform the new work on the instant, and then to repair the defects in the old. Mr. Lonsdale was a long time giving his directions, and Rupert, who was impatient to join Kate in the garden, at last came forward, and said—

"I wish you would finish this silk, Matilda, and let me go and play."

Mr. Lonsdale, who appeared not before to have noticed the boy, snatched the skein of silk from off his hand, and impatiently bid him,—

"Go along." Then addressing Matilda, he angrily demanded, "why she kept that boy tied to her side all day long;" and asked her whether she wished to

turn her brother into a girl, teaching him those feminine employments.

Matilda, who strove with all her might to make Rupert manly, began an explanation of her management of him, which her papa instantly cut short by bidding Rupert—

"Run away from the girls, and find some more fitting associates."

"Why do you not mix with boys?" continued he; "there are plenty outside the house. Away with you, and play with them." And seeing that Rupert hesitated, unable at once to comprehend the strange order, that he was to mix in the rude sports of vulgar boys, the father peremptorily commanded his young son to quit the room, and go and join in the games of the boys in the street.

Matilda looked imploringly at her father, but she felt that remonstrance would be worse than useless, and during an hour that he sat superintending her work she suffered much.

It was a grief of no common sort to have the little brother, over whom she had watched with such care, and had so scrupulously preserved from evil example, thus recklessly thrown among a set of lawless and uneducated boys. It was with difficulty that she could restrain her tears, and command herself sufficiently to perform the task assigned her; and the moment that Mr. Lonsdale retired, and she was left alone, she flew to the street-door to look out, and see what had become of her little charge.

To her great relief, and far beyond what she had hoped and expected, she beheld the child standing aloof from the other boys, crouched beside the yard-gate. At sight of his sister he bounded forward with an exclamation of joy, and in another instant Matilda had drawn him in, and shut to the door.

"I kept by myself," said Rupert, "and did not play with the boys, for I thought you would not like it; they were so rude, and said so many bad words."

Matilda felt relieved, but it was out of the nature of things to expect, that should this command of Mr. Lonsdale's be persevered in, that a child so young and inexperienced as Rupert, would always stand aloof, while other boys were playing and enjoying themselves. Virtuously trained as he had been, he might, perhaps, at first be deterred by the bad he saw and heard, but his eyes and ears would too soon become familiarised with what was wrong, and he would end by joining, without reluctance, in the sports which afforded others so much pleasure.

Unhappily Mr. Lonsdale did repeat his command, and Rupert's play hours were now always passed in the society of boys, who, however much they might assist in rendering him manly in his father's eyes, spoilt his manners and injured his character. Matilda strove with all her might to counteract the evil, but the boy had heard his sister's authority mocked at by his father, and he too often set her at defiance, and persisted in following his own inclinations.

Sometimes, indeed, she regained for a time her influence over the boy, and he was good and tractable, but these intervals were of short duration. He had acquired a love for the society of his associates, and he enjoyed the freedom from any restraint that he experienced when away from home.

But though Rupert cared less for his sister, his love and respect for his father was not increased, and he was even occasionally impertinent in his behaviour to him; the consequence of which was, that he often got a severe beating.

This was a wretched state of things for poor Matilda; and as she remembered the peace and love in which the family dwelt during the lifetime of her late mother, she felt sometimes as if her heart would break. Occasionally she was tempted to depart from her usual line of good conduct; angry replies to her father, and words in justification of herself, when unduly blamed, now and then rose to her lips; but hap-

pily she still retained the power to check them. She remembered her duty as a daughter, and as a Christian she knew that patience, meekness, and endurance, were incumbent on her. She had, too, one never failing source of consolation—that of prayer. Constantly and earnestly this young girl prayed for strength to persevere in the path of duty. She had also been brought up to read daily a portion of the Holy Scriptures; and young as she was, being fully impressed with the necessity of taking them for rules of our conduct, and guides through life, she used to select such passages for daily meditation as she considered peculiarly applicable to her own case.

Our Blessed Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, was one of these chosen parts; and St. Paul's chapter on "Charity," was another.

She read and remembered, and strove to apply what she knew; often and often repeating to herself,—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

"Blessed are the meek."

"Blessed are the peace-makers."

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect."

And then she would say to herself,—

"If I have not charity, I am nothing."

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind."

"Charity doth not behave itself unseemly."

"Charity is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil."

"Charity beareth all things,—endureth all things."

Any one to have known Matilda's behaviour as a daughter, would have imagined that she had the kindest and most indulgent of parents. Instead of which she was severely tried.

Some persons may think that it is out of nature, that she should continue amiable under such trials and provocations. Had *nature* been allowed its sway, there is no doubt that she would have conducted herself differently. But Matilda was assisted in all her struggles to resist evil, and fortified in all her reso-

lutions to do right by a power from above. The Holy Spirit that she prayed for was accorded to her.

Let us pause a moment in our tale to reflect upon the conduct of young persons, who, unlike our heroine, have kind and indulgent parents. Are they grateful for so great a blessing? and do they seek to return the benefits constantly heaped upon them, by obliging and dutiful behaviour? Or do they rebel against the authority, which for their own good occasionally interferes with their will and desires, giving sullen looks, showing perverse tempers, or returning answers of such a kind as pain worse than a sting, or the cut of a sharp instrument.

It was now the height of summer, and, confined to the house, and restrained from freedom of action as Matilda was, the long days favoured the attempt she now and then made to visit Broomheath, where she was always soothed and comforted by Mrs. Rushton's conversation. The old woman was aware of the different sources from which her young friend's troubles sprung.

From her own observation, and from the histories of Harriet, she was only too well acquainted with Mr. Lonsdale's treatment of his children, and his behaviour generally in the family. The grievance of Rupert's being sent to mix with boys in the street, Matilda told herself. She made no comment on her father's conduct, but merely stated the fact, and its results, and consulted her friend on the best way of counteracting the evil.

That the evil was great there could be no doubt of; and the long summer days, which were productive of a little comfort in one way to Matilda, were a source of discomfort in another, for Rupert would often remain out playing till dark, keeping up beyond his proper bed-time, and being still longer in the society which did him so much injury. It might have happened that Rupert had fallen into the society of good boys,—of which it is needless to say there are

abundance among the poor, who, though they might have a little interfered with the polish of his manners, would have kept alive in his mind a sense of right and wrong, but unfortunately, he got among a set who disobeyed their parents, and disregarded truth.

Before the end of the summer Matilda had the extreme pain of finding her brother guilty of a falsehood. Rupert was very fond of using a hammer and nails, and he would occasionally take the hammer out of his papa's tool-box, and too often forget to return it to its place when he had done with it. Many times his elder sisters, when seeing it lying about, would replace it; but once or twice it so happened that when Mr. Lonsdale wanted to use the hammer, it was missing. One day, the second time that it had occurred within a very short time, Mr. Lonsdale sought for his hammer, and it was not in its place. He called angrily to the girls to know what had become of it; they could not tell. He then taxed Rupert with having taken it away, but the boy declared he had not seen it for some time. Mr. Lonsdale went back into his study, but Kate, who was coming down stairs at the moment, and heard what had passed, exclaimed as she entered the sitting-room,—

"How could you tell papa, Rupert, that you had not seen his hammer lately, when you had it in the garden mending our wheelbarrow just now, and you bid me put it away, but I forgot it?"

"Oh! Rupert," exclaimed Matilda, "is it possible that you could tell such a falsehood? You, who used to be so true, that every one believed whatever you said."

Rupert coloured violently, and began to cry.

Matilda spoke to her brother most seriously, about the wickedness he had been guilty of in telling a lie; and she so thoroughly convinced him how wrong he had been, that he cried bitterly, and promised that he would never commit the like fault again. But, unhappily, the impression made on his mind, though

strong at the time, was not lasting, and before another month had passed, the boy repeated his fault, and this time he was not half so penitent as at first; and again, after a third time deviating from the truth, when reproved, he appeared very indifferent, both as to his fault and to the displeasure he incurred.

Matilda became truly unhappy at witnessing the change that was taking place in her brother, and she exerted her utmost powers to win him back to what was right. She talked to him, and entreated him to listen to her counsels and advice; but having no authority to restrain him, and keep him away from companions who set him a bad example, she effected but little good. It was grievous to her to see the little boy she loved so dearly, and in whom she used to have so much pride and pleasure, turning out ill. She often considered what would be the end of it, and it cost her long and painful meditation to know what was to be done. Sometimes she thought if her father could be made aware of how altered the child was for the worse, he would recall his injudicious order, and forbid Rupert mixing any longer with associates that did him so much harm. It was often a subject of astonishment to her, that Mr. Lonsdale did not notice the change that had taken place in her brother's character, but he seemed either insensible or indifferent to it. At last Matilda thought that the only thing to be done was to speak to her father on the subject, and awaken him to the melancholy fact, that his son was pursuing a path that must ultimately lead to his ruin. But though Matilda arrived at this conclusion, how would it be possible to act upon it, or what would be the result if she summoned resolution to unfold the truth to her father. Would he not think her daring and presumptuous, and what would be the consequence? She trembled at the thought of taking so bold a step, and day after day passed on, and she was still irresolute. One hour she decided that she would brave all chance

of her father's displeasure, and resolutely meet him; then the next she shrunk, frightened from the task. Weeks passed on in this state of indecision, and Rupert in the meantime was getting more confirmed in his bad habits. The struggle in Matilda's mind was a most painful one. She earnestly desired to do the thing that was right, but she dreaded what might be the consequence of her interference. Then again she could almost fancy that she heard her mother's voice calling to her from the grave, to rescue her little son from the ruin into which he was falling, and to put aside all selfish feeling, and step boldly forth in his cause.

At last Matilda came to the determination to do what she conceived to be right; and one evening, when Mr. Lonsdale had retired into his study, she followed him to unburden her mind of the weight that had so long oppressed it.

Fresh instances of her brother's degeneracy, and other sources of trouble and vexation, had caused Matilda to weep bitterly that afternoon. All colour had forsaken her cheeks, and her eyes were heavy, giving to her countenance that peculiar expression which caused her to bear a strong resemblance to her late mother during her last illness. The constant worry of spirit she had of late undergone had made her thin; and altogether her appearance was such, that she could not well have happened upon a more propitious moment for the success of the object she had in view.

Mr. Lonsdale had been attached to his wife in no common way, and when she died, he appeared to lose all that made life desirable. His character, after that event, underwent a remarkable change. A year before, he appeared a warm-hearted, benevolent man, was a kind friend, and an affectionate father, and was beloved and respected by all who were intimate with him. But Mr. Lonsdale was deficient in stability of

character; he was like a house built on sand, which, when the storm of adversity blew over it, fell. It was not that in worldly matters he was deficient in firmness; but he was unfortified by sound religious principles, such as would sustain him under the bitter stroke that had befallen him. His religion was not deep; it was not that of a man who acknowledges the wisdom of an Almighty power in every dispensation, and though grieving, submits, at the same time, unmurmuring, to the afflictions which faith tells him are sent in love. Mr. Lonsdale read his Bible, and went regularly to church, and was not deficient in the outward demonstrations of Christianity; but his heart had never been properly impressed with Divine truths, nor had he sufficiently accustomed himself to look upon the events of this life as transitory, and of little importance when weighed against the interests of eternity.

Mr. Lonsdale was one of those characters who require to lean upon another, in order to pass well through life. He had been so long accustomed to the encouragement, advice, and consolation, under annoyances, of his wife, that when she was withdrawn from him, he sunk down as though all that had hitherto supported him was gone. During the first months of his affliction, he secluded himself in a solitary spot by the seaside, where he passed his time in bitter and unavailing regret, wandering about without employment, and no other companion than his wretched thoughts.

On his return to his desolate home, it seemed that the sight of his children irritated him, and by degrees he grew into the harsh and tyrannical father he has been described. He was miserable himself, and he made all around him so. Often it would seem as if he was not conscious of what he was doing.

Mr. Lonsdale was the youngest son of a man possessing a small independent fortune, which, at his death, passed to the elder brother, on whom it was

entailed. This brother dying unmarried, the property descended to Mr. Rupert Lonsdale, the father of the family to whom our tale relates.

Mr. Rupert Lonsdale was brought up to the law, and was in fair practice as a country attorney when he came into his fortune. For some years he lived most happily with his wife and children, enjoying peace and competence, when, in an evil hour, during a visit to London, he was induced to join in a speculation which turned out most ruinously. For once he had deviated from his usual plan of consulting his wife; had he done so, he would have had more time to inquire into the nature of the concern in which he embarked his money; but he was urged "to make haste and conclude a most advantageous bargain;" and he thought he would keep the affair a secret, in order, after a time, to cause his wife an agreeable surprise.

The first information Mrs. Lonsdale received on the subject was, when her husband, distracted with grief, informed her of the entire loss of their property.

Mrs. Lonsdale bore the news with her usual equanimity, and her unruffled manner, and the sweetness of temper with which she listened to the details of the unfortunate transaction, imparted consolation and courage to her husband. He immediately determined to resume his profession, and a good opening for a solicitor offering at the time at Riverton, he removed there with his family, and by diligence and strict integrity of conduct, he soon got on, and at the time of his wife's death, he had risen into a very good practice.

During the time of his seclusion, after his heavy bereavement, Mr. Lonsdale's business was left to the management of his head clerk, and he, being an unprincipled though clever man, took advantage of his master's absence to ingratiatate himself with the clients; besides which, he threw out hints that his superior was in a state of mind that incapacitated him from business, and that, moreover, by absenting him-

self, he had shown an utter disregard for the interests of those who employed him.

At the end of about five months, this man, whose name was Sharpe, quitted the service of Mr. Lonsdale, and, setting up in business for himself, drew off the principal part of his master's clients. At first, Mr. Lonsdale, absorbed in grief as he was, paid little attention to the facts of the case; but when he had to meet the expenses of his family and establishment, he became aware of the serious injury that had been done him.

Unfortunately, his behaviour under these circumstances did not tend to lessen their bad effects. He gave way to the irritation of his feelings, and, from want of patience and courtesy, he drove away the few persons who would still have adhered to him. He had saved a little money, and this served for present expenses, and, with strict economy, would carry him on till some favourable turn took place in his affairs. But the favourable turn did not appear likely to arrive.

When Matilda entered her father's study, she found him sitting at a table, where he appeared to have been occupied arranging papers and letters; several packets tied up and labelled were lying before him, while heaps of torn MSS. lay scattered around. A letter which he held in his hand was engaging his deep attention; for, after fixing his eyes for a moment with no unkind expression on his daughter, he immediately resumed its perusal, and shortly seemed unconscious of her presence.

It was a long letter, and as Matilda glanced at it, she recognized the handwriting of her mother. Mr. Lonsdale sighed heavily as he read on, then tears gathered in his eyes, which presently flowed fast down his cheeks, then came a deep sob or groan, and, flinging the letter from him, he threw himself back in his chair, and struck his clenched fist violently against his forehead. Matilda was much moved at witnessing her

father's distress, and, losing all fear of him for the time, she approached and addressed a few soothing words to him. There was something inexpressibly kind and gentle in Matilda's accents and manner when she sought to comfort another; and the tones of her voice struck upon her father's heart, and roused him from his abstracted position; and, throwing off the reserve he was accustomed to preserve in the presence of his children, he exclaimed,—

"I am a wretched man, Matilda, and have been so ever since the death of my wife. I cannot recover from her loss;" then, suddenly rising, he paced rapidly up and down the room for a few minutes, then, stopping short, he continued,—

"Everything goes wrong with me. Sharpe has ruined my business; all my clients have left me; even Hayward and Brooks, whom I thought were staunch, I learn to-day have put some of their affairs into that rascal's hands."

Matilda looked very much concerned, but was quite at a loss what to say. She was too sensible not to be aware that it was owing to her father's neglect that he had lost his business; but then she thought that the grief which had incapacitated him from attending to it was quite natural. She would have liked to suggest that, by close attention and diligence, it might perhaps be recovered; but she was afraid to venture on saying such a thing, as her father might consider it either impertinent or a reproach to him for his negligence. While these thoughts were passing through her mind, Mr. Lonsdale had re-commenced arranging his papers; and, desiring very much to do or say something to comfort him, she said,—

"Can I assist you, dear papa? I should be most happy to help you in any way I could."

Mr. Lonsdale cast an earnest and inquiring look at his daughter; and Matilda, advancing, placed her hand gently on his, and said,—

"I am very, very sorry for you, dear papa."

"You do not, cannot love me, Matilda;" replied the unhappy man.

"Indeed I do," said Matilda earnestly, and bending forward, she kissed his cheek.

Mr. Lonsdale put his arm round her and embraced her tenderly; then in a few moments he exclaimed, "I have been wrong in everything; I have made my children unhappy, and afraid of me. Juliet, I know, does not love me; and the little ones always run away from me if they can."

"Do not say Juliet does not love you, dear papa; I am sure she does; and the little ones—" Matilda stopped short, for she thought this was a favourable moment to mention the object of her having sought an interview with her father, and taking courage, she told him all her fears respecting her brother, of the change for the worse that had taken place in his character, and begged him to forbid Rupert's associating any longer with the boys in the street.

While Matilda spoke her father appeared somewhat abstracted; but he must have gathered the substance of what she said, for in reply he answered:—

"Do as you please about Rupert; tell him he has my orders to do as you bid him."

Matilda was made very happy by this decision; and observing that Mr. Lonsdale did not notice her expressions of pleasure, nor seem inclined to speak any more, she was leaving the room to impart to Juliet the result of her mission, when he called to her, with great earnestness of manner, and was about to speak, when, checking himself, he said,—

"No; better not."

Matilda paused, in expectation of what was coming; but her father, in an altered manner, as though he had changed some important determination, said,—

"Where is Juliet? send her to me, and the little ones too; they are not gone to bed yet, I think?"

Matilda replied that Rupert and Kate were still up, and that she would send them as well as Juliet. Her

father then drew her to him, and, embracing her, said, "Good night; God bless you!"

The other children obeyed the unwonted summons, and were dismissed from their father's presence with words of kindness, such as had not for a long time greeted their ears.

Matilda returned to ask if she might come to Mr. Lonsdale's room the next morning, to summon him to breakfast.

"May I come, papa," said she, "and tell you when breakfast is ready to-morrow morning, as I used to do?"

"Not to-morrow," replied Mr. Lonsdale; "not to-morrow. Some day, perhaps—" and he turned away, as Matilda thought, to conceal emotions which prevented his adding more.

Matilda still lingered, but her father said nothing else, and again bidding her good night, she left the room.

CHAPTER IX.

Anticipations of Happiness. Painful Suspense. An Alarm. A vacant Room. An important Letter. Desertion. Characteristic Differences. Plans for Reform. Regulation of Time. Studies and Accomplishments. Keeping a Diary. Excitement concerning School Girls. Renewal of Acquaintance. Assurance. Flattery. Objectionable Companion. Shady Lane. Emily's Gift. A Troublesome Governess. A Secret.

MATILDA awoke the following morning with a delightful elasticity of spirit. She had two sources of great happiness: one, that her brother would for the future be kept from companions that did him much injury; and the other, that her father had resumed his former kindness towards his children, and would, she trusted, continue to live with them in peace and love. She set about her various employments as though new life and energy had been infused into her: nothing seemed a trouble; but, on the contrary, everything appeared to wear a cheerful or joyous aspect. She saw to the preparations for breakfast herself; and though she was forbidden to go and call her papa, she prepared for him two or three little delicacies, of which she knew he was fond. She set his chair ready for him, and laid, as in old times, a book of family prayer inside his place at table, hoping that he would return to his custom of reading prayers, as he used to do in the happy days when her dear mamma was alive.

Eight o'clock was the usual breakfast-hour; but half-past eight, and then nine struck, and Mr. Lonsdale did not appear. Matilda could not imagine what detained him so long. At first she thought he was tired with the exertion of looking over papers and letters the night before, and that he required more sleep than

usual. But when half-past nine and then ten came, she began to grow uneasy, for Mr. Lonsdale was never in the habit of over-sleeping himself, and was always impatient for his breakfast. Harriet was questioned as to whether she had seen anything of her master, or had heard him stirring; but she could tell nothing about him.

The rest of the children began to take the alarm, and first one and then another went repeatedly to listen at the door of their papa's room, to hear if there was any sound within. But nothing was to be heard: a profound stillness prevailed; and the young party came creeping down stairs, speaking in whispers, as though some dread mystery hung over them.

For a long time, Matilda and Juliet agreed that no one must venture to knock at the door, or much less open it and go into the room; but at last, the state of uncertainty in which they were involved, and the fear that something bad had happened, became so intolerable to bear, that it was resolved that an attempt should be made to ascertain the truth of the matter.

Matilda, bearing in mind that her papa had desired her not to call him to breakfast, decided it would be best to send the servant; therefore, summoning Harriet, she bid her go and knock at her master's door in order to awaken him. Harriet ascended the stairs, while the young party stood in painful suspense below, listening to what might be the result of her errand. Once, twice, thrice, she knocked, and no answer from within was returned.

"What can be the matter?" exclaimed Matilda, greatly agitated and distressed; and hastening up stairs, she called out in a trembling voice,—

"Papa, papa! what is the matter? are you ill?"

Still no answer was returned.

"Is his door fastened, do you think?" said Juliet, who, pale with dread of she hardly knew what, had followed her sister up stairs.

"I will try," said Matilda, and turning the handle,

she pushed gently at the door, which yielded to her pressure. It was not fastened from within. For a moment or two she paused irresolute what to do; but considering that, even should her father be in his room, he could not, under the circumstances of the case, be angry at her intrusion: if he were ill and needed assistance, it was right in her to go in, and she determined to go forward.

Advancing to the bed, she drew back the curtains; but great was her astonishment to find her father was not there, and that the bed had the appearance of not having been slept in that night.

An exclamation of surprise from Matilda, drew all the party into the room, and after many comments on the singularity of the circumstance, many suggestions were put forth as to what it could have arisen from.

Finding that her father was not ill in bed, Juliet's spirits revived, and she laughed at the idea of their having all stood watching and knocking at the door of an empty room, and waiting breakfast for one who was not in the house. But Matilda, who had witnessed her father's emotion and distress of mind on the preceding evening, could not join in her sister's merriment; and a vague sense of fear that all was not right with him, took possession of her mind; besides which, she was painfully disappointed of the happy family reunion she had anticipated with so much pleasure.

All day she continued restless and uneasy, and watched anxiously every movement in the house, trusting it might be her father returned; for she longed to be assured of his safety, and her heart beat with the hope that he would again take her in his arms, and look at her, and speak to her, with the affection that he had done on the previous evening. But the day passed on, and so did many more, without her feeling any relief on the subject. Mr. Lonsdale did not return. Juliet said he had occasionally absented himself before; but Matilda replied that, though he staid out longer than was expected, it was always known in the family when

he was going out, and above all, he had never disappeared in the mysterious manner he had now done.

With the feeling of propriety that always guided Matilda in everything respecting her father, she made no comments to any of her acquaintance on his strange absence; and what few inquiries she ventured to make as to when or where he was last seen, were so carefully worded, that no suspicion of Mr. Lonsdale's eccentric conduct were excited.

At last, after nearly a week of painful suspense, the mystery was partly solved. Matilda received a letter from her father, the purport of which was to inform her that he had left his home, but for how long a period, or if for ever, was not stated. The letter was written in evident agitation and distress of mind, but evinced a degree of thought and carefulness for the welfare of his children. He informed Matilda where to look for the key of his bureau, in which, he said, she would find a packet sealed and directed to herself, containing money sufficient for the maintenance of herself and the rest of the family, for the ensuing year, but that she must be very careful of it, as she would receive no farther remittance before the expiration of the stated period. The rent of the house and taxes for the year, were, he informed his daughter, paid in advance. It appeared evident that what Matilda had said respecting her brother, during the last interview she had had with her father, had made an impression on his mind; for he desired her to act as she thought proper respecting Rupert, and to tell him that it was the "command of his father, that he should obey his eldest sister." And a little farther on in the letter, he said, "tell Kate the same thing."

Not a word was said of the writer's future plans or prospects, or the slightest hint given as to his place of destination; indeed, this last he seemed desirous to conceal; for he told Matilda not to try to find out herself, nor institute any inquiries as to where he was

gone; adding, that any attempt to gain information on the subject would be useless.

It would be hard to describe the effect this letter took upon Matilda, or the emotions to which it gave rise. The first feeling was that of a keen sense of disappointment that her father had left her; for, with the sanguineness of youth, she fully expected that his former love for his children had returned, and that they would never again experience any harsh or unkind treatment from him. Hers, too, was a disposition that sought for comfort and support in a superior; she desired to have some one to whom she could look up for advice and guidance in her conduct; and, above all, she longed for a parent's tender care and love.

To rule and govern was no pleasure to her: she felt that she was of an age that required to be under authority herself; and she trembled as she thought of the responsible situation in which she was placed. She had received the letter alone, and she sat long with it in her hand, revolving its contents in her mind, and lost in thought as to the important consequences it would involve. She felt overpowered and bewildered, and it was some time before she could realize the singular and unprotected situation in which, with her sisters and brother, she found herself placed.

At last she started up, and went and communicated the extraordinary news to Juliet; and then telling the little ones that their papa was safe and well, she returned to her own room, to find relief to her heart in prayer.

Never did Matilda feel so strongly the need of consolation and support; and in her orphan and unprotected state, she sought for it from the only source that was now left her. No human counsellor could have poured into her heart the peace of mind and strength of purpose which were then mercifully awarded her; and after a time, she rose from her knees with her feelings calmed, an earnest desire to do her

duty, and the steadfast hope that she should never neglect to seek for that aid which alone could enable her to pursue a right course in the singular position in which she was placed.

The perusal of Mr. Lonsdale's letter excited in Juliet also strong emotions, but their nature was in many respects of a different character from those of her sister. Like Matilda, she felt that it was very strange to be thus left to themselves, and she thought that very often they should be at a loss how to act; but with this feeling came a sense of relief from the control which had often been painfully exerted over herself, and sisters, and brother; and though educated with proper notions of filial duty, she could not entirely repress a sensation of satisfaction that she should no longer be subjected to it.

Volatile in her character, and accustoming herself too little to serious reflection, she had not looked forward to her father's being again to his children what he had once been, and without making allowance for his unhappy state of mind, she only viewed his conduct as it had reference to her own individual happiness. She had never lamented the change in her father in the same way that Matilda had done; for she was not so fully impressed as her sister with the blessing and importance of being superintended by a kind and careful parent.

But Juliet was of an affectionate nature; and it is due to her to say that her first feeling on reading her father's letter was that of pleasure on learning that nothing untoward had happened to him. It was not till this emotion had subsided, that the feelings which have just been described, found a place in her mind.

Amidst the cares and thoughts that came thronging fast upon Matilda, was one reflection which afforded her unmixed gratification, and that was the being empowered to restrain her brother from mixing with associates that had done him so much harm. But *Matilda* was doomed to find her satisfaction on this

head very imperfect; for, though she was armed with her father's authority, a power stronger than that deputed to her by her absent parent, too often thwarted all her endeavours to control her brother. Rupert's sense of duty, and his principles altogether, had undergone an entire revolution. From having been an open, ingenuous little boy, he had become sly, underhand, and deceitful; and whenever he could evade Matilda's watchfulness, he would, in open defiance of her orders, escape from the house and join his improper companions, who encouraged him to despise and rebel at the commands of a sister.

Matilda was quite at a loss what to do; she could not restrain her brother by force; besides, she felt that would be of no use, unless she could influence his mind. She patiently repeated her orders, and sought to interest him with her instructions; but though she occasionally induced him to attend to his lessons, her words of counsel and reproof were either not listened to, or heard with such evident signs of impatience, that she was convinced her brother was not in the least benefited by them.

Among other plans which she devised for his benefit was, providing as much amusement as was in her power at home. She allowed him the unrestricted use of hammer and nails, together with several of the implements for carpentering, which her father's tool-box contained; she procured pieces of wood for his childish attempts at making dolls, tables, and chairs, and assisted him with her advice. She also tried to revive the interest he once took in his own little garden, giving him new plants and flowers, and working with him. Sometimes these occupations would amuse him for a short time; but his tastes were sadly deteriorated. In nothing was Rupert's alteration more conspicuous than in his behaviour as regarded his youngest sister. Formerly he seemed to wish for no better companion in his sports than Kate; he was fond of her, kind and obliging in his manners, and proud

whenever he could do her any little service. Now, if ever the children played together, the boy was rough and imperious, and Kate used constantly to come crying to her elder sisters, to tell of Rupert's unkind conduct towards her.

Matilda was very sorry to have the little girl teased, and Juliet felt out of patience with her brother, and frequently scolded him; but this did not mend matters. Juliet had brought Rupert rather forward in music; and it was a vexation to her, that she could now hardly ever induce him to receive a lesson; at the same time, the boy was alive to the charms of music, and often when his sisters were singing, he would remain contentedly in the room. The love of music was strong in all the family, and the elder girls were constant in their practice. Indeed, they followed all their studies and pursuits with a regularity that did them great credit.

Sometimes Matilda would neglect her daily lessons to continue the perusal of an interesting book, or she would pursue too eagerly her drawing, of which she was enthusiastically fond. But she kept a diary, in which she entered a faithful account of all her studies and employments during the day, and when at night she found that her time had not been properly regulated, she promised herself amendment, and for a time there was no repetition of the faults.

Juliet, except in music, was certainly much more desultory than Matilda; she tired sooner of occupation, and more frequently wanted relaxation; still, the example of her sister, and the good sense in which she was by no means deficient, made her, when there was no particular temptation to the contrary, follow with a good deal of regularity the usual routine of business. Thoughtlessness was the great drawback in her character, and proved injurious to her in many respects.

Both girls were very fond of out-door exercise, and delighted in rambling in the fields and lanes of the pretty country round Riverton. But Matilda often lost her walk, from the necessity she felt under of

either watching Rupert, or of being on the spot to receive him when he returned from his truant expeditions. At such times Juliet would tire of having no other companion than Kate. The young ladies with whom she and her sister were intimate were dispersed in various ways. The Grahams and Rose Vernon were severally gone to visit their relations; one young lady had been ordered to the sea-side, and another sent to a distant school; in short, all the girls whom Juliet cared for as companions were out of the way.

Under these circumstances, she very often thought of Eliza Moore, and keenly regretted the separation that had unavoidably taken place. It seemed as though her feelings of disappointment respecting Eliza were revived in their original force, and she again bitterly lamented the loss of her false friend. Juliet missed too, for she was a little of a gossip, the news Eliza was in the habit of telling her. She certainly heard occasionally marvellous tales from Miss Pringle; but Miss Pringle was not a girl, and could tell her nothing of Miss Bell and the other young ladies at Miss Wright's school. Juliet knew nothing farther concerning the inmates of this interesting establishment beyond the circumstance of the usual breaking-up at Midsummer, and the reassembling of the scholars after the vacation. It is true that she saw the young ladies at church, and she was able to note what new faces were among them, and to mark the absence of some old ones; and, above all, she was assured of the fact that Miss Bell was of the number who had returned to school.

It was some little excitement to watch Miss Bell as she came out of church; but, as she always walked beside Miss Wright, there was not room for much speculation, except—and this was a point of deep interest—that Eliza Moore now and then planted herself directly in the way of the school as they came out, and that on such occasions her arm appeared to brush against Miss Bell as she passed on. Juliet could not understand this,

especially as she observed that the recognition between the two young ladies seemed cold and formal. Could it be, she thought, that Miss Bell and Miss Moore had quarrelled, and that Miss Moore took this method of manifesting her displeasure against Miss Bell? No, it could not be that, for then they would not notice each other at all; besides, Eliza only looked careless, not angry, and there was nothing particular to remark about Miss Bell, except that she always looked very red when Eliza touched her; but then, Miss Bell often did look very red without any apparent cause for her doing so. Juliet was quite perplexed.

One afternoon, feeling very dull, for she had been disappointed of a drive in a donkey-cart with her sister, she stood for a few minutes listlessly looking out of the parlour-window for something to amuse, when two or three smartly-dressed young ladies passed by. The sight of them reminded her that it was dancing-day at Miss Wright's, and Juliet was just in a mood to have many painful associations conjured up by the remembrance of that day. She thought how unjustly and unkindly she had been treated by her chosen friend, in being forsaken by her for a mere stranger. Still her attention, notwithstanding her musing, was directed to first one young lady and then another as they came tripping by, some looking smiling and happy, and some tired and cross. Last of all came Miss Turner, tossing her "little conceited head," and giving herself great airs, as she paraded along with a servant following behind, carrying her dancing-shoes and fan. She was dressed so gaily, even for her, that Juliet strained her eyes to the utmost to look after her; and she was, with her cheek resting against a window-pane, stretching out to catch the last glimpse of Miss Turner's retreating figure, when the tap of a parasol against the window made her start up and look round, when, to her great surprise, she beheld Miss Moore standing looking in, and nodding and smiling as in old times, and in another instant she was on the

door-step, and, turning the handle with the familiarity of by-gone days, she walked straight into the room and offered her hand to Juliet.

Juliet, taken quite by surprise, and thinking such behaviour on the part of Miss Moore very strange, gave her hand coolly.

"What is the matter, dear Juliet?" said Miss Moore, in her most gentle and winning manner; "you did not formerly receive me so."

"Formerly!" repeated Juliet, in a tone of voice that was meant to awaken Miss Moore to a recollection of the caprice with which she had been treated by her.

"I know," said Miss Moore, "that we have not met and walked and talked together as we once used to do, but you must allow, dear, that you have been very cold and distant to me of late."

Juliet looked and felt indignant.

"Never mind," said Miss Moore, not appearing to notice the look; "little differences will sometimes arise between even the best and most faithful friends."

"You have not been a faithful friend to me," said Juliet.

"Do you mean because I noticed poor Emily Bel a little, and tried to comfort her. Oh! I did not think you could entertain so mean a feeling as jealousy."

Juliet was startled at having the tables thus turned upon her; but, before she had time to answer, her late friend went on:—

"Emily admires you very much, far more than she does Matilda; she says you look so *spirituelle*—Emily has such a sweet way of bringing in French words when she talks; and she is so good-tempered and so obliging. She likes you amazingly!"

"She never spoke to me," said Juliet, doubtful whether she ought to be pleased or not.

"That is of not the least consequence," replied Miss Moore; "Emily has great penetration of character; besides," added the speaker, taking Juliet's hand, and looking sentimentally into her face, "do you not

think that I should talk of you, my first friend at Riverton?"

Juliet appeared softened, and Miss Moore continued—

"I have so often wished to see you, but I could not call, because—because—" She hesitated, and then said abruptly, "because you were so changed."

"That is not just," said Juliet, whose sense of what was right prevented her being imposed on; "you are giving an ungenerous turn to the affair; you know—"

"I know nothing," said Miss Moore, hastily interrupting her, "but that I am delighted to have had this little explanation with you, and to find you still my own dear, darling friend. I came on purpose to ask you to take a long walk with me to-morrow. I have something very particular to say to you. I cannot stay now, for I am going out directly I get home with grandmamma. Say, dear, you will walk with me—do dear; you must."

Juliet, who fully felt how unworthily she had been treated, hesitated. Her pride told her she ought to refuse this first overture at reconciliation, while her inclination strongly prompted her to accede to Miss Moore's proposal.

"You surely will not say no to your own Eliza," said Miss Moore, in the blandest of accents. "You must not refuse me; say you will go."

Juliet could not longer resist the entreaties of one in whose society she had once taken so much pleasure; still, willing to give her pride as gentle a fall as possible, she said,—

"My sister is so much engaged, that I certainly do often want a companion in my walks."

"To be sure you do," said Miss Moore, emphatically, "and I will call for you at two o'clock to-morrow. Will that time suit?"

"Yes," replied Juliet.

"Then depend upon it I will be punctual," said Miss Moore. "I am delighted at the very thought.

Now good-bye—good-bye; do not forget." So saying, the young lady hastened off, leaving Juliet not only surprised, but pleased.

When Juliet gave an account of this interview to Matilda, Matilda expressed surprise on hearing that her sister had consented to be Miss Moore's companion in a walk the following day, for she thought that the capricious girl had proved herself entirely unworthy of her sister's friendship.

Juliet, in answer, said she could not refuse; and on Matilda's recalling to her sister's recollection the heartless manner in which she had been treated, Juliet exclaimed,—

"Would you not have me forgive and forget?"

Matilda had no appropriate answer ready at the moment, but, after a time, she said that forgiveness of injuries was always right, but that there were certain things in certain characters which it was better not to forget. She did not express herself exactly in these terms, but she made her sister perfectly aware of what she meant, adding that she was doubtful, from several little things she had observed in Eliza Moore, whether she was an acquaintance whom it was very desirable to cultivate.

Juliet said it would have been very difficult to have refused the request, Eliza making it in person.

Matilda suggested that her sister might send a note to decline the walk; but Juliet said that would be impossible, adding that Miss Moore would think it exceedingly strange that she should change her mind.

Matilda could not help smiling at the idea that the apprehension of being charged with changeableness should operate to prevent Juliet's writing to decline a walk with one who had shown towards her the most flagrant disregard of everything like steadiness or consistency of conduct.

Juliet saw the smile, and coloured, for she felt that she was acting weakly.

Matilda said her sister might throw the blame upon

her, and say she wanted her at home. But Juliet, over whom her late friend had regained a good deal of her former influence, refused to accede to this proposal, saying that she really must go this once, even if she declined Eliza's friendship ever after.

When the two friends, for so it is supposed Juliet Lonsdale and Eliza Moore must again be termed, met on the following day, they seemed by tacit consent to refrain from all allusion to the past. Juliet was too happy in the recovery of her friend to wish to disturb the serenity of her feelings by recurrence to a painful subject; and Eliza was perfectly satisfied to resume, for whatever purpose she desired it, her influence over Juliet, without making any farther attempts to throw the blame of her own late unworthy conduct on to her companion.

"Which way shall we go?" said Juliet, as the two girls were about to start.

"Any way you like," replied Eliza, in her most engaging manner; "it is all one to me, as long as we walk together;" then, seeing that Juliet did not immediately decide, she added, "shall we go on to the Common, or down by the river-side, or along Shady Lane?"

"Let us go into Shady Lane," said Juliet; "we shall be free from interruption there;" and to Shady Lane the friends proceeded.

It was a delightful afternoon: the air was balmy, the birds sang gaily, and the flowers exhaled a sweet perfume; and Juliet felt very happy as she sauntered up and down the green retreat, with Eliza by her side.

After a time, it struck Juliet that her companion was neither so cheerful nor so talkative as she used to be; and full half an hour passed without any allusion being made to the important matter that was to be communicated. Juliet did not wish to appear impatient, and reflected that perhaps Eliza was pondering the weighty affair in her mind. Juliet, too, began to feel something of a restless curiosity to hear Eliza

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speak of Miss Bell, the young lady who had been the cause of the separation between herself and her dearest friend.

At length, when resting on a grassy hillock, the conversation took the desired turn.

"How pretty this is!" said Juliet, laying hold of a chain that was suspended from the neck of her friend.

"It is a gift of poor Emily's," said Eliza; and she sighed.

Juliet thought this a propitious moment for making some inquiries respecting one who excited a lively, though painful interest in her mind; and she asked, though not without a degree of timidity,—

"Why do you say 'poor' Emily?"

"Because I am sure she is unhappy," replied Eliza, all at once resuming her accustomed lively tone and manner; "she is away from those she loves, and is kept at a school."

"But she must be educated," suggested Juliet.

"Miss Wright," continued Eliza, unheeding what Juliet said, "will not let her go out anywhere. I got grandmamma's consent to have a party of young ladies—I wished to have the party on purpose to please Emily—and when I invited Miss Bell, Miss Wright would not let her come,—was it not cross?"

What Juliet replied, Miss Moore did not hear; for she immediately went on,—

"And then Miss Wright looks at all her letters, both what she writes and what she receives, just as if she was a child."

"And does not Miss Wright look at the letters of the other ladies?" asked Juliet.

"No," replied Eliza; "they can all write just what they please, and when they please—all but poor Emily; is it not a shame?"

Juliet was on the point of saying that if Miss Bell acted like a child, she must be treated as one; but she would not run the risk of offending her newly recovered friend, by any observations that might reflect discredit

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would not run the ... her newly recovered
friend, by any observations that might reflect discredit

on the behaviour of the young lady in question, so she turned the conversation by inquiring if Miss Bell learned dancing this half-year.

"Oh yes!" replied Eliza; "she learns everything; but as to dancing, she does not seem to care much about it, except when she dances with me, and we can say a few words together. But I dance very little with Emily—the French teacher is generally her partner; Miss Wright seems to prefer that it should be so;—she is very tyrannical."

Juliet was half inclined to say something in Miss Wright's defence; but she checked herself, thinking that she could not know the state of affairs so well as Eliza, who was frequently at the school taking her dancing-lesson.

Eliza than ran on in praise of Miss Bell, commending warmly her generous disposition, and enlarging upon various talents and accomplishments, which Eliza considered her to possess in no small degree. At length, a pause ensuing, Juliet resolved to inquire what was the interesting event that Eliza promised she should hear.

"Oh I remember!" said Eliza, in answer; "I had something yesterday I wanted to say to you, very particularly indeed. I wanted you to do something for me."

"I will do anything for you, with pleasure," replied Juliet; "what is it?"

"Nothing at present, dear," said Eliza; "I will explain: I thought, yesterday, I was going immediately from home with grandmamma; but she received a letter this morning to put off our journey for a time."

"And you wanted me to do something for you in your absence?" said Juliet.

"Just so," replied Miss Moore; "but as I am not going away at present, I do not need your kind services."

Juliet felt disappointed, and wished at any rate to

know in what way she could have been useful to her friend.

"Tell me how I could have served you, dear Eliza," said she.

"Not now," replied Miss Moore; "perhaps—" then stopping, she appeared to be intently thinking; "perhaps I shall have to tell you some time; but it is a secret."

"A secret!" said Juliet, considerably excited.

"Yes," replied her companion, "a profound secret:" and then looking as if she repented having prematurely alluded to the subject, she continued, "you must promise not to say anything about it."

"I cannot," answered Juliet, "for you have told me nothing."

"I mean," replied Eliza, "that you must not tell anyone that I have anything to communicate to you."

Juliet said, "It would be silly to do so;" and the subject dropped.

As the girls returned home, Juliet inquired when they should take another walk together.

Eliza answered that she could not at all tell, and that very likely it would be a long while first; but, on observing that Juliet seemed disappointed, and wishing to retain an influence over her, she added, "you know, dear, that I am under grandmamma's control; but I will endeavour to join you in a stroll very soon again."

"Will you call for me, then?" said Juliet.

"I had rather not call," replied Eliza; "at least, not at present: Matilda is so stiff."

Juliet made no reply; but she reflected when and where Eliza had seen her sister to cause her to make this observation; for she was well aware, and so must Eliza have been, that she had not been in company with Matilda, since the memorable evening of "Miss Wright's anniversary."

"You can take your chance of meeting me when I am walking out," said Eliza; "or you can pass by our

house, or go into the meadow opposite; and if I see you from the window, I will try and come to you."

Juliet felt half disposed to decline this method of keeping up an acquaintance; but Eliza smiled at her in so winning a manner, and shook her so warmly by the hand at parting, that she acceded to it.

"Depend upon it," said Eliza, as she turned away from Juliet, "that if I cannot be with you, I shall be thinking of you, and wishing we were together."

CHAPTER X.

Doubts respecting a Friend's Sincerity. Watching. Songs. Scruples. Copying Music. Concealment. Regret. Neglected Duties. Dangerous Path. Advice respecting a Book. Weak Conduct. Locking Drawers. Leading others into Temptation. False Reasoning. Jealousy. Strange Companions. A Profound Secret.

JULIET was very much delighted at the revival of her acquaintance with her favourite friend, but after the first feelings of pleasure on the subject had a little subsided, she began to reflect on the singularity of Miss Moore's conduct, not so much as regarded her having abruptly ceased all intimacy with her, as her having, in an equally sudden manner, sought to renew it. On reflection, too, Juliet was not quite satisfied with Eliza's manners towards her, for though she was very kind in all she said, and used many endearing epithets towards her, it did not appear as if she felt the same as formerly. Juliet seemed to think that the interest Eliza expressed about her was assumed; but then Juliet asked herself why Eliza should play a part, and she was angry with herself for entertaining thoughts so injurious to her friend. Then, again, Juliet thought it strange that Eliza should be at so little pains to enjoy her society, and she was of opinion that it was treating her with too little ceremony, the manner in which her friend had desired her to seek for her.

Juliet felt hurt, and her pride was wounded, and she decided that she would make no attempt, at any rate, for a long while, to see Eliza again. These feelings held in full force for two or three days, but were subsiding under the wish she felt for such a pleasant companion as Eliza in her walks, when she accidentally encountered her friend, who asked her to

accompany her to a little village not far from Riverton, where she was going on an errand for her grandmamma. Miss Moore was in high spirits, and she talked in so animated and amusing a manner, that when Juliet took leave of her friend, her first wish was that she might speedily meet her again.

Accordingly, Juliet, on the following day, bent her steps in the direction where she thought she should be most likely to see Eliza, but though she passed and repassed her house, and lingered long in the meadow opposite, she saw nothing of her. The next, and several following days she watched in vain, and thoughts of unkindness and caprice were fast rising in her mind, when just as she was about to return home, a servant met her close to the house, with a message from Miss Moore to request her to walk in.

Eliza met her friend very kindly. "Come in," said she; "grandmamma has been out all day, and we can have a chat. You know I do not like to ask you to call when she is at home, for she is not fond of the company of young ladies."

It did not strike Juliet to inquire why Eliza had not invited her in sooner, for as she was sitting opposite the window, she must have seen her walking about.

"I have been so busy all the morning," continued Eliza; "I have not had a moment to speak to any one; I have been copying music, but it just now struck me you could help me. Will you, dearest," added she with a winning smile, "copy one or two songs for me?"

Juliet replied that she would do so with pleasure.

"These are Emily Bell's," said Eliza, pointing to a parcel of songs which were lying on the table beside her: "she has lent them to me. They are such sweet music, and the words charming. Emily kept them locked up in her box for a long while; she never

sings them at Miss Wright's, they are not the sort of thing for schools."

"Too difficult, I suppose," said Juliet. Miss Moore did not reply, but selecting three songs from the collection, she rolled them up, and giving them to Juliet, asked her to get them done as soon as she could.

When Juliet looked at the songs on her arrival at home, it struck her that the words were very unsuited for girls to sing; there was nothing positively wrong in them, but they were such as her mamma had never allowed either Matilda or herself to sing. They were vain and foolish, and she felt a strong wish that Eliza had not imposed the task of copying them upon her. She felt, too, that she should not like her sister to see her so employed; but what could she do? Eliza would laugh at her if she took back the songs and said she considered them ill-suited for girls to sing, and she would say that hundreds of songs had no worse words. Besides, to refuse Eliza a favour, would be to destroy their newly-revived friendship at once. Juliet felt very uncomfortable, and was still more so when she found herself hiding her occupation from the eyes of her sister, whenever she heard her approaching. It was the first time that she had ever desired to conceal her occupation from Matilda, for Juliet, with all her faults, was open and ingenuous.

"I will never do so again—never hide anything from Matilda," said Juliet to herself, as, much relieved, she finished the last line of the last song she had to copy, and carried it home at the specified time.

Miss Moore was profuse in her thanks for the assistance Juliet had rendered her, and lavish in her praise of the very nice manner in which she had executed her work; and Juliet was parting from her friend so well pleased with the commendations bestowed upon her, that she considered it made her

was a more than usual amount of needlework to be done in the family. Rupert was no longer the considerate little boy he had once been with his clothes, and he came home almost daily with them torn, and Matilda had mended one or two sets so often, that they had at last to be replaced with new ones. The family linen, too, was very much out of repair; and the clothing of all the girls wanted thorough overlooking and attention.

Juliet found it very difficult to find time for her secret employment; and when Matilda proposed a walk after long sittings at the needle, she had to form excuses of headache or fatigue, which she despised herself for making.

"Only once out of this scrape," thought Juliet, "and I will never, never get into another."

But Juliet had entered a dangerous path; a path along which its followers glide with easy and imperceptible steps, but which, on attempting to find a way out of, becomes entangled with thorns and briars, and innumerable intricacies of the most painful and embarrassing nature. Let those who have taken a single step on this dangerous road, instantly, and without a moment's hesitation, turn back. It may be painful to retrace that one step, but it is nothing to the remorse and anguish that must ensue, when the deluded traveller has gone far, and endeavours to free himself from the dreadful perplexities in which he finds himself entangled.

At last, after much pain and difficulty, Juliet's task was accomplished; and she carried back the music. Eliza received it, as before, most graciously, and with many encomiums upon the excellency of its execution.

"You have obliged me very much," said she; "I wished exceedingly for these songs, and now, thanks to your kindness, I have them; I only wish I could get the originals back to Emily."

"There can be no difficulty in that, surely," said Juliet; "you see Miss Bell every dancing-day?"

"Yes," replied Eliza; "but Miss Wright is always by, and Emily does not want her to see the songs, and above all, she would dislike having it known that they had been lent to me."

A reply as to the impropriety of girls having any concealments from their governess, rose to Juliet's lips, but there it stopped; for the recollection of her own hidden transaction flashed painfully upon her mind, and silenced her. Neither could she recover her spirits during this interview with her friend, and though Eliza seemed to take more pains than usual to be lively and entertaining, Juliet quitted her with a wish that she had followed Matilda's advice, and had never renewed her acquaintance with one whom she knew her sister did not thoroughly approve of.

It would have been happy for this heedless girl, if these feelings had remained in full force; but with her unreflective habits, the impression soon wore away, and the pleasure and excitement of Eliza's company was become so necessary to her, that she was never happy if a day passed without either meeting her or seeking to be in her company. The journey, too, that Miss Moore had spoken of, seemed now likely soon to take place; and though it did not appear probable that the separation would last more than a few weeks, it was looked forward to by Juliet with much real, and by Eliza, with a great deal of pretended sorrow,

Eliza told her friend that they must see each other very often; and though Juliet wasted many hours in useless watching, still Eliza did occasionally meet her. One day Miss Moore brought out a book, which, she said, belonged to poor Emily, and had solaced many of her weary hours.

"It is sweetly written," continued the speaker; "you shall judge for yourself; I will read aloud as we walk;" and she commenced the perusal of an exciting and cleverly written tale.

When Eliza had gone far enough to call forth a con-

siderable degree of interest in her hearer, she put the book into Juliet's hand, saying,—

"Take it home with you, and read it; you can return it to me in a day or two."

Just at this moment, a turn in the lane in which the girls were walking, brought them upon Mrs. Stanley.

After a few cheerful words of recognition on the part of the lady, she noticed the book which Juliet held in her hands.

"Reading, I perceive," said she; "something useful, no doubt;" and, taking the volume from her young friend, her eye rested for a moment on a passage, when, turning to the title-page, her countenance changed.

Juliet, reading disapproval in the expression, said,—

"It is not my book."

"But you are reading it," said Mrs. Stanley, looking steadily at Juliet.

Juliet attempted no farther justification of herself, by saying that her companion had only just begun it to her; for she felt that she had already attempted a paltry evasion of the truth.

"The perusal of none of the works of this author will do you any good, my dear," continued Mrs. Stanley, returning Juliet the book. "Ask Matilda if I am not right; she knows the author's name, I dare say." So saying, Mrs. Stanley hastened off to meet a lady whom she said was waiting for her.

As soon as she was out of sight, Eliza exclaimed, "It is not very civil of Mrs. Stanley to say our book is not one of the right sort."

"Mrs. Stanley means kindly, I am sure," said Juliet; "and I think I had better not read any more of it."

"You are not serious, surely?" said Eliza; "I think I am as good a judge as Mrs. Stanley; and I assure you, there is not a single objectionable sentence in the whole book."

"Still I had rather not read it," said Juliet.

"Then you prefer pleasing Mrs. Stanley to me?" said Eliza, in a tone of pique.

"No," answered Juliet; "but—"

"You are afraid, then, of Saint Matilda at home?" said Eliza, throwing a comical expression into her countenance.

"Oh, Eliza! you know—" began Juliet.

"I know nothing, dearest," cried her friend, interrupting her, "but that I love you very much, and wish to give you a little amusemeut; so let me have the book, and I will go on with it;" and, notwithstanding Juliet's protestations that she would much rather not hear any more, and her frequent interruptions, Eliza persisted in reading on, feeling assured that Juliet's opposition would cease as she proceeded with the exciting narrative; and so it proved; for her friend's remonstrances became fainter and fainter, till lost in the fascinations of the tale, she forgot everything but the interest it excited.

"There," said Eliza, stopping at last, "I have read nearly a quarter of the book, and I should be glad to know what there is wrong in it. Do you see anything objectionable?"

"I hardly know what to answer," replied Juliet; "there is nothing said that is positively wrong; and yet—" she paused, not knowing exactly how to convey her meaning; and before she spoke again, Eliza said, warmly,—

"There is nothing in the least objectionable about it; take it home with you and finish it; I must leave you now."

"Thank you," said Juliet; "I do not wish to take the book home."

"What! not wish to know how the story goes on, and how it ends?" cried Eliza.

"You can tell me the end," said Juliet; "I had rather not have the book myself."

"How ridiculous you are!" said her companion. "Come, put the book in your pocket; I brought it purposely to amuse you."

Still Juliet did not take the book.

"I think," said Eliza, "it is very affronting to me, that you refuse to read what I think right."

"It is very amusing," said Juliet, in a conciliatory tone, desiring not to displease her friend.

"And yet you will not read it to please me," said Eliza; "you are very disobliging."

"I am sure, dear Eliza, I mean nothing unkind towards you," said Juliet.

"Except that you will do nothing I ask you," said Eliza, reproachfully. "It is quite throwing discredit on me, your refusal to read what I recommend;" then, abruptly changing to the caressing tone she always used when she wished to gain a point with Juliet, she continued: "No one need know you have the book; Mrs. Stanley, with all her impertinence, cannot peep into your pocket; besides, darling, you must take the book from me now, I cannot carry it; for I have to take home some writing-paper, envelopes, and other things for grandmamma, and I shall be quite loaded."

Juliet attempted no farther refusal, and weakly suffered Eliza to place the book in the pocket of her dress.

Here was Juliet, within a very short time from her last dilemma, again involved in an underhand transaction. She would have been very much ashamed that Mrs. Stanley, after the caution she had given her, should know that she had brought the book home with her, and she feared to tell Matilda of its being in her possession; therefore it was necessary to hide it.

"I need not read it," thought Juliet to herself, "though I have brought the book home."

So thought Juliet for the first few hours after she had parted with Eliza; but, in the mean time, the possession of the book was a great trouble to her, for she

knew not where to conceal it. It was too large to carry about with her, unless her pocket was covered with the shawl she wore when walking out, and this could not be. She had never been in the habit of locking her drawers and boxes; and to do so now, would be to excite Matilda's suspicion, in case she should perceive they were fastened. Conscience made her cowardly; and she could think of no safe place to deposit her burden in.

Juliet, by her weak conduct, had drawn her trouble upon her, and she was rightly served.

As regards the practice of locking drawers, it is one that ought to be adopted in youth. Young women have no right to lead servants into temptation, by carelessly leaving money about, nor by keeping open the repositories of ribbons, gloves, handkerchiefs, and laces, of which the owners, frequently, do not know the exact amount. A giddy girl little thinks that a piece of finery which by her carelessness she has afforded a servant the opportunity of purloining, is often the first step in a downward career of folly and vice. Letters, too, are constantly by some left about, and many affairs divulged, to the injury of both writer and receiver.

But to return to Juliet, whom we left determined not to read Miss Moore's book, and uncertain where to find a secure spot to deposit it in.

The latter difficulty was at last got over, and the book lodged in a safe hiding-place. But with the feeling of security from discovery, came a fresh train of ideas. First, Juliet thought, what will Eliza say when she finds that I have not read the work she so highly commends and begged me to oblige her by perusing? She will be sure to ask me if I have read the book when I return it to her, and I cannot pretend I have done so if I have not—it would not be sincere and true.

Poor Juliet! her notions of truth and sincerity must have been at that period very much confused.

Next came the thought that the tale was very interesting, and that if she were to read it,—not, she said to herself, that she would do so,—but suppose she did read it, who was to know it?

Last of all came the reflection, and this decided the matter, that she really ought to know, ought to judge for herself, whether her best beloved friend could possibly recommend a work that it was better not to read. Justice to Eliza compelled her to examine into this matter herself.

Thus reasoning, or rather, thus mystifying herself as to right and wrong, she, as soon as opportunity offered, drew the exciting tale from its hiding-place, and gave herself up to its perusal.

The work in question was one which, without containing any glaring deviation from right principle, was so artfully worded, as to leave a juvenile reader in doubt whether there were not many occasions when equivocation, and evasion of the truth, and concealments, were not only justifiable, but proper. Nor was this all. The hero of the tale, for whom a great interest was skilfully excited by the author, contrives, by underhand dealings and sly ways, to achieve his purposes, in a manner that tempts the reader to exclaim, "What a clever fellow; he deserved success!"

Such works infuse their subtle poisons almost imperceptibly, and injure the cause of sincerity and truth without the reader being aware that such is the case. And so it was with Juliet; for as she closed the volume she exclaimed to herself,—

"How silly I should have been not to have read it, I should have lost a great pleasure: there is no occasion that any one should know what I have done; and where is the harm to myself or anybody else?"

As regarded herself, Juliet had produced an effect on her character, much the same as if the delicate edge was rubbed off some finely polished instrument. And with respect to others, who could tell how far the

deadening of her once keen perceptions of right and wrong, might have a baneful influence over them?

Happy are those girls who have some kind friend who will guard them against the perusal of injurious works; and happy are they who, while their own judgment is immature, will be guided by those who have had more experience than themselves.

Juliet received a friendly warning from Mrs. Stanley, but she disregarded it.

As soon as the book was finished, Juliet was all impatience to talk it over with Eliza; and neglecting some of her duties at home, and hurrying over others, she secreted the volume under her shawl, and set off in search of her friend.

Taking the most retired way, she proceeded first to the vicinity of Mrs. Moore's house; but learning from a servant, whom she met, that Eliza was out, she next bent her steps in the direction of the little village where her friend was occasionally in the habit of going; but not finding her there, she went through Shady Lane, and round by the common into the town. Tired and weary with her unsuccessful pursuit, she was bending her steps homewards, when, standing at the door of the baker's shop, she saw Miss Moore engaged in conversation with Mary Mills, the baker's daughter.

Juliet hastened up to her friend with more than usual emotions of pleasure, but received a sudden chill from the short and hasty nod which was returned to her joyous salutation. Juliet could not imagine what was the matter, and looked at Eliza for an explanation; but neither her look nor herself appeared to be observed, so intent was Eliza on her conversation with the baker's daughter.

Juliet felt surprised, and then indignant; and she would have returned home immediately, without seeking to attract the notice of so capricious a person any further, if it had not been that she wished to be relieved from the charge of the book, which she held concealed under her shawl.

Crossing to the opposite side of the street, she waited till the conference should end between the strangely-assorted parties. It semed most extraordinary to Juliet the intimacy that appeared to have sprung up between her own dearest friend and Mary Mills; and as she watched the emphatic noddings, the occasional laugh, and mysterious whispering between the two, twinges of jealousy mingled with her feelings of astonishment.

"Mary Mills!" said she to herself; "Mary Mills, of all people; a girl who, not to say anything of her low station, is notorious for her falsehoods!" one whom nobody in the town would believe, even on her word. To think of choosing her for an intimate! Eliza used to dislike her excessively, and call her a disagreeable, prying girl; and I myself have seen her hardly able to be civil to Mary when she went into the shop to buy cakes. There! laughing and whispering again! I have a great mind—"

Her soliloquy was cut short by the principal subject of it tripping gaily across the road, and all smiles and animation, holding out her hand, saying at the same time,—

"Forgive me, dearest Juliet, for my apparent inattention to you; but I was obliged to speak to that girl on most important business, as you shall presently hear."

Juliet's displeasure vanished on the instant.

"Can you stop now, dear?" continued Eliza, "or will you meet me later in the day; I am wanting exceedingly to speak to you, and—"

"Let it be now," said Juliet, eagerly interrupting her friend; "I, too, want to talk to you. I have read your book."

"You have!"

"Yes; and I like it exceedingly," said Juliet, emphatically.

"Then you will trust my judgment another time," said Eliza, with equal emphasis. "You found nothing wrong in it?"

"I should have been very silly not to have read it," was Juliet's reply.

"We will walk to the common," said Eliza; and, linking her arm with an affectionate pressure into Juliet's, the two girls proceeded on their way.

Arrived at their point of destination, Eliza looked round, and exclaimed, mysteriously,—

"This will do; here are no walls with ears, nor trees with ambushed spies." Then, changing to a tone of the most confiding friendship, she continued:—"You remember that I once talked to you of a secret that I should probably reveal to you some day."

"Oh! yes; I remember well," said Juliet, "a profound secret."

"Most profound:" said Eliza, lowering her voice; "the time is now come; sit down on this hillock beside me, and I will unfold it to you."

CHAPTER XI.

A Sister's Neglect. Want of a Friend. A Sister's Thoughtfulness. A Brother's Illness. Change of Character. Singing Hymns. A Melancholy House. Happy Recovery. Riverton News. A Call from Miss Wright. An Unpleasant Discovery. Sad Consequences of Deceit. Painful Reflections. A kind Sister. Contrition.

DURING this long period, when Juliet's time and attention were so much engrossed by Miss Moore, what were Matilda's employments, and what were the thoughts that occupied her mind? It has been stated that it frequently happened that Matilda was unable to be the companion of her sister during her walks; but feeling the inconvenience of this, both to herself and Juliet, she contrived, after a time, so to arrange matters, that she was almost always ready to attend the summons of her sister. But very often after Matilda, by considerable exertion, had contrived to lay her little plans, so as to be able to enjoy a walk at the customary hour, she found that Juliet was either gone out, or else was about to start to meet her friend; and it not unfrequently happened, that when an hour had been appointed beforehand for the sisters to go out together, Matilda was kept a long while waiting in her walking-dress, and at last obliged to take it off, and give up the thought of a walk with her sister that day. Juliet, too, had not only neglected her share of the domestic duties, but she had ceased almost entirely to be Matilda's companion in their mutual studies and pursuits.

But what was more strange, and far more painful than anything else to Matilda, was, that a sort of distance had crept almost imperceptibly into the intercourse between the sisters.

Matilda loved Juliet with all the warmth of her

affectionate heart. Her sister was endeared to her by the tender ties of kindred; she had the same home, the same interests, and hitherto the same studies and the same recreations as herself. She had always been her companion from choice, for, to no other person could Matilda open her heart, or talk of their common griefs, their hopes and their fears, as she could to her sister. Juliet was to Matilda as a second self.

Bitterly did Matilda feel the want of a dear domestic friend; and often after she had moved cheerlessly about, arranging her small household, she would retire for a time to her own room, and sit meditating on her lost mother, and the delightful intercourse she used to have with her, but now, alas! for ever past. Still Matilda did not indulge long in fruitless sorrow, for, brushing away the tears that the recollection of her past and present situation occasionally called forth, she would rise up resolute, and set about the fulfilment of the duties that devolved upon her.

Kate had lately shown a fretful temper, and Rupert was a constant source of annoyance; but towards both children Matilda exerted herself to the utmost to do what was right; teaching and persuading them, setting them a good example, and strictly watching herself, so as not to give way to the irritation and petulance which their conduct and tempers were calculated to bring forth. In the work of training these children Juliet now took but small part, and when she did, she was either so impatient, or so careless, that her instructions did little good.

Had any one brought it strongly before Juliet, that she was neglecting her duty, and causing her sister much pain by her conduct, thoughtless as she was, she no doubt would have made occasional efforts over herself to have acted in a different manner; but her want of reflection prevented her taking a right view of matters, and she pursued her own plans without considering how they operated upon the happiness or comfort of others.

It seemed, too, as though Eliza Moore exercised a spell over Juliet, for she would not unfrequently return from her walks with an unsatisfactory feeling, as though she had wasted her time, or had been associating with one whose companionship did her no good. Still, day after day she pursued the same course, heedless of her own advantage, or that of others.

Matilda did not thoroughly approve of Miss Moore. The elder sister had more penetration of character than the younger; and, as regarded the young lady in question, it was not improbable that Matilda was more clear-sighted to her defects, from her not having used towards her the same arts of pleasing as those by which she had won Juliet's love. Matilda sometimes mentioned her opinion of Eliza, and warned her sister against too great intimacy; but the caution always called forth a warm defence from Juliet of her friend, and strong encomiums on her many excellencies. As regarded Juliet's neglect of Matilda, and running away from her home duties, her sister forbore to say anything, for she called to mind how the last two years of Juliet's life had been saddened, and she had not the heart to interfere with what appeared to renovate her health and spirits and give her pleasure. Another thing operated strongly with Matilda in causing this forbearance. About the time that Juliet was suffering great vexation at the loss of Miss Moore's friendship, and living in a perpetual state of disquiet with her father, she became thin and pallid, and a cottager's wife, to whom Juliet had been sent with a message, told Matilda afterwards that she thought "Miss Juliet looked very ill, just as if she was going into a decline."

Ann, too, had said, when looking kindly at Juliet,—"Poor dear! you seem as though you wanted to be out every day, playing about in the fields. I doubt you sit too close at your work."

The same observations had at other times been made to and of Matilda, but Matilda only thought of

her sister, for whom her fears had been strongly excited; and now that Juliet's health and strength were perfectly restored, she attributed the recovery to her sister's entire freedom from control, and to her exercise in the open air.

But cheerlessly, and sometimes sorrowfully, as Matilda's days often passed, she was destined to experience a new and heavy affliction. Rupert became dangerously ill, and his life was despaired of.

Both the young ones had been suffering from some of the complaints incidental to childhood; but Matilda thought they were tolerably well recovered when Rupert fell ill. During several weeks that the little boy had been previously indisposed, a change for the better seemed at work in his character; he was more tractable than he had of late been, was patient under the necessary confinement to the house, and often evinced gratitude to Matilda for her kindness in attending upon him, and her endeavours to amuse him. Towards his youngest sister, too, an agreeable alteration in his manners took place, for he would play with her, and conduct himself much in the way he had formerly done, and he would even make allowance for the waywardness that illness caused her occasionally to display.

Matilda hailed this change in her brother with joy and thankfulness; and the love she used to feel for him, and the pride and pleasure she took in him, were returning in full force, when he was attacked with the illness that threatened his life.

Matilda was deeply grieved, and all that the most unwearied care and devoted love could effect, she did for the child. She nursed him night and day, never leaving him, except when some urgent cause demanded her presence elsewhere. All her pursuits were abandoned, and every recreation, either for health or pleasure, given up.

Juliet, who was much concerned at the illness of Rupert, was now a good deal more at home, for her

friend Miss Moore, in company with her grandmamma, had quitted Riverton for a time. Matilda left the care and management of the house a good deal to her sister, and engaged her to give more attention than she had lately done to Kate.

Rupert never seemed able to bear Matilda out of his sight; and he would never willingly take medicine or nourishment from any hand but hers; and he frequently expressed great love for her, and regret that, by his improper conduct, he should have given her pain. His illness was of that nature, that while his bodily powers were failing, his mind seemed to become stronger. He often alluded to the past, and all the religious feeling that had been implanted in him seemed to rise strongly to his mind, and he expressed himself convinced of the sinfulness of his conduct, and often asked Matilda if she thought God would forgive him.

Matilda did her best to comfort and console the little penitent, and directed him how and where to look for forgiveness. When exhausted with talking, he would request his sister to read to him a book which had once been a great favourite with him: "The Lives of several good Children who died early." And another source of comfort to the boy was, when, on growing more restless as night came on, his sister would, in a low and tender voice, repeat nursery songs, or sing hymns to him.

Mr. Knight attended Rupert, and exerted his utmost skill for his recovery; but all human care and love seemed unavailing; for the medical man at last pronounced that there was very slight chance of the child's living.

It seemed as though the boys in this family were never destined to attain maturity; for two boys had been cut off at about the same age that Rupert had now attained. They were fine promising children; and grief for their loss appeared to assist in causing the premature death of the late Mrs. Lonsdale.

It was a melancholy house now: there was no music, nor voice of cheerfulness, nor laughter, to be heard in it. All the girls were more or less affected by the sad state of their only brother. Matilda was grieved from her very heart; and Juliet was very sorrowful, especially when, on her return from her long rambles, which even now she occasionally took, she found her brother no better. Kate, too, was very unhappy, and tried in her childlike manner to comfort the sick boy, and be of use to Matilda; and very often she would ask how long it would be before her "dear brother would get up and play with her again?"

For a long while the child seemed to hover between life and death; sometimes his state creating a little hope in the anxious hearts of his sisters, and then again leaving them in the depth of despondence.

Many and fervent were the prayers that Matilda sent up to the Throne of Grace, for the recovery of her brother, who had become more than ever endeared to her since his illness.

At length it pleased the Great Disposer of events that a change for the better should take place in the little boy's disorder; and Mr. Knight pronounced that, with the greatest care, and provided there was no relapse, Rupert would most probably recover.

Matilda's joy at this good news was proportionably great, to what her grief and anxiety had been; and she poured forth her heartfelt gratitude to her heavenly Father, for His loving kindness and mercy in permiting the child to live.

To Mr. Knight, too, she expressed her deep sense of the skill and kindness he had shown in the treatment of her brother; for this benevolent man, surmising the circumstances in which the young Lonsdales were left, had given his time, and provided medicine for the sick boy, without any charge, or any desire for future remuneration.

How constantly is such generous and disinterested

conduct met with among medical men; and not only is their kindness exercised towards the better classes of society, but many a good deed is done amidst scenes of poverty and wretchedness, where there is no tongue to proclaim nor eye to witness it, save that One which beholds and registers all the actions of man.

One morning, a day or two after hope respecting her brother had begun to revive in her heart, as Matilda was giving directions to Juliet concerning some little article of diet to be prepared for the invalid, Harriet, who had been out on an errand, hurried into the room where the sisters were engaged, and said,—

"There is such a piece of news in the town,—everybody is talking of it: Miss Bell has run away from Miss Wright's school! The young lady has been writing and having letters sent to her she should not; and her governess is half-distracted, and has sent a policeman after her. Some persons have been helping with the letters,—I do not know who; but they say it will all come out by-and-by."

"How very sad! Poor Miss Wright! how sorry I am for her!" exclaimed Matilda; while Juliet turned very pale.

Matilda remarked her sister's emotion, and attributing such an excess of feeling to the weak state of her nerves, brought on by long-continued anxiety respecting Rupert, kindly said,—

"Do not let this unpleasant news agitate you too much, dear Juliet; you do not seem well; sit down."

Juliet made no reply, but turning abruptly away, she continued her employment, while the blood rushed back to her cheeks and dyed them of the deepest crimson.

Kate running in at the moment to say Rupert was calling for her, Matilda made no further remark, but hastened away to attend upon her little brother.

In the course of the day it transpired through a visiter to the kitchen, that Harriet's was an exaggerated account of the events connected with Miss Wright's boarding-

school. Miss Bell had not run away, neither had she attempted to do so; but it was quite true that she had been detected in carrying on a secret correspondence, and that she had been assisted in so doing by some mischievous and ill-judging persons.

Matilda was sitting alone at the close of day, watching the uneasy slumbers of the sick child and holding his hot hand in hers, when the servant entered the room, to say that Miss Wright was below and desired to speak with Miss Lonsdale.

Matilda immediately rose to obey the summons, and charging Harriet to keep careful watch beside her brother, she went down into the parlour.

Miss Wright was seated by the table, and made no movement on Matilda's entrance, and when the young girl went up to her and held out her hand, the schoolmistress refused to take it. Matilda was very much surprised at this reception, so different from Miss Wright's usual kind and courteous manner; but drawing up a chair, she sat down on it opposite the lady, and waited till she unfolded the object of her visit.

"I am come," said Miss Wright, "on a very unpleasant business. You have, no doubt, Miss Lonsdale, heard the reports which are in circulation respecting me and my school,—reports which are calculated to do me great injury?"

Matilda replied that she had been told that Miss Bell had run away; but that since then, she had been very happy to learn that the report was unfounded.

"Miss Bell," continued Miss Wright, without noticing Matilda's reply, "is the only child of a man who unexpectedly came into a somewhat large fortune about a year ago; and to separate his daughter from acquaintance she chose to make contrary to his wish, Mr. Bell placed the young lady under my care."

Miss Wright paused a moment, and then went on, —"I am not of a suspicious nature; still I thought it my duty to take every precaution, that the trust reposed in me should not be misplaced; and I examined

every letter that passed through the post, either to or from my charge."

"Then it is not true," said Matilda, eagerly, "that Miss Bell sent and received letters unknown to you?"

Miss Wright fixed a steady gaze on Matilda, and proceeded: "By means that it is unnecessary to mention, I have discovered that I have been completely imposed on, and through the medium of some young persons in this town."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Matilda, in surprise.

"Yes," replied Miss Wright; "Miss Bell being found out herself, was quite indifferent as to its being known through whose means she disobeyed her parents, deceived her governess, and brought discredit upon herself, for she has named her assistants in this shameful transaction."

"Has she?" said Matilda.

"She has," replied Mis Wright, with emphasis; "and they are Mary Mills, Miss Eliza Moore, and yourself."

"What is it you say, Miss Wright?" exclaimed Matilda, starting up in amazement; "do you say that I assisted Miss Bell in deceiving you?"

"The young lady says so herself," replied Miss Wright; "and not only does she declare it, but the baker's daughter says the same thing; for I have had Mary Mills up before me."

"Oh! Miss Wright," exclaimed Matilda, "you cannot, do not, believe them?"

"I cannot do otherwise," replied Miss Wright, firmly.

"I declare to you, most positively," said Matilda, in great agitation, "that I never did anything of the kind of which they accuse me; I am wholly incapable of it. What can induce those cruel girls to utter such falsehoods about me? Oh!" continued she, clasping her hands, "what would my poor mamma say if she knew that such a charge was brought against her daughter? She trained us up in the love of truth and

hatred of all deceit. Miss Wright, I could never bring myself to act in an underhand or deceitful manner towards any one."

There was something so true and earnest in Matilda's manner, that Miss Wright for a moment seemed shaken in her belief that Matilda had been a party concerned in deceiving her; but this feeling died away instantly under the remembrance of the positive assurance that she had received, that Miss Lonsdale was one of the parties who had assisted Miss Bell in her dishonourable behaviour.

"Do you not believe me, Miss Wright?" continued Matilda, in a tone of great distress.

"I cannot believe you," answered Miss Wright, "for I have—" she stopped abruptly, for a new light flashed across her mind. There were two Miss Lonsdales; and she exclaimed,—"I have probably made a mistake, and have accused you, when perhaps it is your sister who has been guilty of this most unworthy conduct."

"Juliet," said Matilda, warmly, "is as incapable as I am of the conduct imputed to us."

"You cannot answer for your sister," said Miss Wright; "it is a known fact that one of you have been abetting my pupil in her falsehood and deceit."

"I *can* answer for my sister," cried Matilda, still more warmly; "she has no secrets from me; and I am as certain of her innocence, as I am of my own;—and here she is," continued she, as Juliet entered from the street, "just come in in time to clear herself from such a shocking and unjust charge." So saying, Matilda called her sister into the parlour.

Juliet started and changed colour at the sight of Miss Wright, while Matilda gazed at her sister with mixed feelings of dismay and astonishment.

"I have no occasion to state the nature of my errand to you," said Miss Wright, sternly, addressing Juliet.

"Oh, Juliet!" cried Matilda, in a tone of great excitement, "what have you done?"

Juliet hung her head and trembled violently, while Miss Wright repeated the brief statement respecting Miss Bell, which she had already made to Matilda, enforcing still more the injury that was likely to accrue to her school, from the mischievous meddling of the girls who had interfered between her pupil and herself.

"And now, Miss Juliet," continued the ill-used governess, "will you tell me your reason for acting as you have done?"

Juliet, who had burst into a paroxysm of tears, was for some time unable to speak; at length she sobbed out an almost inarticulate history of having been persuaded to take a part in this business, from its having been represented to her that the two letters,—there were no more,—that she had been concerned in, were to and from poor relations whom Miss Bell was very kind to, but from their being poor, the young lady was obliged to keep her correspondence a secret from her parents.

"I had no intention of doing wrong, I do assure you, Miss Wright," said Juliet, as she finished this statement,

"No intention of doing wrong," repeated Miss Wright. "No intention of doing wrong, when you assisted a girl at school to send and receive letters contrary to the express orders of her governess."

"It was such a good motive," said Juliet, hesitatingly.

"Supposing," replied Miss Wright, "that the case were even as you imagine, no motive can be good that has for its basis disobedience and deception."

The sophistry of Miss Moore's book, by which Juliet had been led astray, flashed at once into her mind, and the unhappy girl wept more bitterly than before.

"If you kept a school yourself, Miss Juliet," said Miss Wright, "you would be aware how unkind a thing it is, to say the least of it, for people to interfere between a pupil and her governess. The consequence

to me of all this business is, that Miss Bell will be removed from under my care, and I shall be considered for the future a very incompetent person to have the charge of young ladies."

"Oh! forgive me; forgive me, Miss Wright," exclaimed Juliet, in a passionate burst of grief.

"Can you forgive yourself?" said Miss Wright, in a sorrowful tone, as she rose to depart. Then pausing a moment at the door, she added, "My forgiveness I do not wish to deny you, but that will avail little towards quieting the stings of conscience, or reconciling you to the thought of the mischief you have done, and the affliction you have brought on your estimable sister." Then holding out her hand to Matilda, who was sitting mute from grief and astonishment, she said—

"I am sorry, my dear Miss Lonsdale, for the accusation I brought against you. I did not imagine two sisters could be so wholly unlike; but I find I am quite mistaken,—you and Miss Juliet are entirely different persons."

All the sickening details of deceit and falsehood, and the underhand tricks that were practised to accomplish a bad end, will be passed over without further allusion being made to them than may be necessary to the clear understanding of this tale.

Miss Bell was a self-willed, refractory girl, who rebelled against parental authority, and, inexperienced as she was in worldly matters, thought herself fully competent to judge of what she considered exclusively concerned herself. Wanting a confidant in her foolish (perhaps wicked would be a fitter term) conduct, she made one of Eliza Moore.

A very great intimacy, as has been shown, was struck up between these two girls; friendship it could not be called, for there was no esteem nor respect on which to found such a sentiment; Miss Bell thought Miss Moore exceedingly pleasant and obliging; and Eliza considered the acquaintance of a

rich young lady, such as Miss Bell, worth securing, and she was highly pleased with the handsome presents that were frequently made her.

The assistance of some one in the town was required to carry on the disgraceful work of disobedience and deception, and Mary Mills was selected for that purpose.

Juliet was called in, in consequence of Miss Moore's absence from Riverton.

The report of Miss Bell's having run away from school was put in circulation by the false and unprincipled girl, Mary Mills. Mary was very indignant at Miss Wright's reproofs, and very angry that her father was told of her bad conduct, and out of a spirit of revenge she fabricated this falsehood. But it did not answer her purpose; for as soon as it was found out that it was one of "Mary Mills's tales," no one believed it; and as regarded herself, her father sent her to serve a distant relation, who, by her sharp treatment and severe displeasure, brought Mary, after a time, to a state of penitence for her bad conduct, and regret that she should have incurred the displeasure of an indulgent father.

The door had only just closed on Miss Wright, after her distressing visit, when Harriet came to say, that Rupert was so restless that she could not manage to keep him quiet any longer. Matilda therefore went immediately to him, and with a heavy heart resumed her place beside her sick brother. She was deeply wounded. In the first place, it was a heavy blow to her,—the discovery that her beloved sister was capable of such unworthy conduct; and in the next, to find that she had secrets kept from her, and that she must now lose all confidence in her. Matilda could hardly realize the facts of the case. Educated as Juliet had been in the love of truth, and with every principle of sincerity implanted from earliest youth in her mind, her sister could not understand how she should have been capable of such a dereliction from upright conduct.

Matilda had often of late been very much pained by Juliet's behaviour to herself, and she had been obliged to own, with sorrow, that her sister did not love her, or care for her society as she formerly did; but that Juliet should be guilty of such unworthy conduct as had been brought home to her, she did not think possible.

And then Matilda thought, with deep regret, of the injurious consequences that would follow from the mischief that her sister had assisted in perpetrating; and then came the mortifying reflection of their hitherto good name being mixed up in so disgraceful a business. Miss Wright had said on a former occasion, that Juliet and herself were particularly well-conducted young ladies; could she ever say this again with truth? Certainly not, as regarded Juliet; and it was poor satisfaction to Matilda to have her name separated from her sister's. Then, above all, there rose in Matilda's mind the solemn reflection of how Juliet had offended against that Great Being, who has declared that He will have truth and uprightness, not only in the actions, but in the very thoughts of all his servants.

Long and painfully Matilda meditated, till at last, quite exhausted, she sought for relief and comfort in earnest prayer.

But if the innocent sister felt thus poignantly, what were the feelings of the guilty one?

Perhaps it will be thought that a girl who could act as Juliet had done, would not be very sensitive as to the results of her conduct. This was not the case with Juliet, for the voice of conscience, though silenced, or not listened to for a time, was not stifled, and it now made itself heard in loud and imperative appeals to her heart and judgment. All her late conduct, her neglect of duty, her slights to her sister, her waste of time in the pursuit of an unworthy person, her sly actions, and last of all, her most culpable behaviour respecting Miss Bell's letters, all now rose before her in their true colours, and she

viewed her behaviour in its right light. It seemed as though a film had suddenly fallen from her eyes, and she was astonished at the different appearance everything now wore from what it had lately done.

But with this clear-sightedness came sorrow and repentance of the keenest kind. She felt mortified and humbled, and had to endure that most aggravating feeling, the loss of self-respect. Now, that her eyes were opened, she reflected with wonder how she ever came to act as she had done, and she immediately threw the blame on to Eliza Moore. It was she who had lured her into the paths of deceit, and by little and little had led her on from bad to worse. But Juliet was not permitted thus to shelter herself under the faults of another, for conscience reminded her loudly of the warnings she had received against too great intimacy with this girl. Besides, as conscience again told her, she herself was no young child, who did not know right from wrong; and moreover, that if she had chosen to have looked a little beyond the surface, there were several things about her friend that evinced a want of integrity and right-mindedness, such as ought to have made her doubtful if she was acting properly in continuing the acquaintance.

That she had assisted in greatly injuring Miss Wright, Juliet knew there could be no doubt of, and she felt alarmed at the consequences that must ensue. She was conscious, too, that she deserved for ever to lose that lady's good opinion, and she thought that every one would think how ill she had acted, and condemn her.

But the bitterest grief of all, was the thought of her behaviour to Matilda: her dear, kind, gentle, forbearing sister. Her whom she had once loved, and did still love, better than all the world beside. Now she had deceived her, had secrets from her, run away from her, and left her in loneliness to perform the duties which she herself ought to have attended to!

Juliet could hardly bear to think of all this; and then there was the sad reflection of how much she must have fallen in her sister's esteem, and how, instead of her former love, doubt and distrust must find entrance into her mind, causing her, Juliet feared, to withdraw her confidence from her, and that Matilda would cease to open her heart to her as she once did, and that there would be an end to all their sweet intercourse; and that their days would never again pass in the peace, love, and harmony, which, as far as regarded themselves, they used to do.

"Oh!" cried Juliet to herself; "if I could but recall the past;" and then she added, "how true is the saying, that we make great part of our unhappiness ourselves!" And Juliet continued for a length of time thinking over her late conduct, and retracing it from the commencement to the present time.

She was still standing in the parlour, and as she saw the people, from the window, passing by in the streets, she fancied every one was happier than herself; she watched two or three cottagers whom she knew were very poor, and as she saw them returning to their humble homes, she thought what was poverty, or want, or any evil, compared to the misery that follows on the consciousness of having done wrong. A little girl, holding by her mother's gown, went by; and then a labourer, carrying his boy on his shoulder, passed on; and then followed another girl, returning home with her basket of purchases from the shop.

"Oh!" exclaimed Juliet, "if I were but like one of those innocent children!"

The evening closed in, the street became silent, the shops were all closed, and no light was visible, except the faint glimmering of a candle in an upper window of the house opposite. Still Juliet did not move, for she had not the courage to meet Matilda; at the same time she hoped her sister might chance

to come into the parlour. Juliet thought something must be wanted for Rupert; but Matilda came not. Was her sister, Juliet considered, so displeased with her that she would not come near her? Juliet had pronounced Matilda's name when her sister went up stairs to Rupert, as soon as Miss Wright was gone, but Matilda had taken no notice of her. Juliet had uttered the name very faintly, and Matilda had left the room in haste, and perhaps she had not heard. Juliet thought it must be so, for it was not Matilda's way ever to turn a deaf ear to a sorrowful cry.

At length the parlour-door opened, and Juliet's heart beat violently; but it was not her sister that entered, it was only Harriet come to shut the shutters. The contrite girl shrunk into a corner, for she did not wish the servant to see how she had been crying, and so escaped notice.

Juliet was now in entire darkness; and after a time she began to feel the want of some friend to speak to almost intolerable, still she had not the resolution to seek Matilda.

And in this difficulty, was there no friend to whom Juliet could fly?

Yes; there was a friend,—a heavenly friend! one who had died for her, and had taken her sins upon himself, on her repentance of them, and who had told the heavy-laden to come to him, and he would give them rest.

Juliet in her distress thought of this friend—her Blessed Saviour; and kneeling down, she confessed her sins, and with penitence and faith humbly sought forgiveness for the past, and strength to do better for the future.

Tranquillized in some measure by her prayers, Juliet determined at last that she would go in quest of her sister, and speak to her on the subject that lay so heavily on her mind.

She opened the parlour-door and looked out; there was no light about—everything was perfectly still;

Kate had long been in bed, and the servant, she concluded, had now retired for the night. Creeping gently up stairs, she listened outside Rupert's door; there was no sound within, and she imagined that the sick boy was asleep, and that her sister was keeping watch beside him. Cautiously turning the handle, she entered the room, and looked round as well as the feeble rays from the night-light would enable her. Rupert was lying on his bed in an uneasy slumber, and beside him, stretched along, was Matilda, with her brother's arm thrown around her; her eyes were closed, and Juliet thinking she slept, was retreating, but before she reached the door, Matilda had sprung lightly from the bed, and putting her hand on her sister's arm, arrested her progress.

"I thought you were asleep," said Juliet, in a faltering voice, "and did not wish to disturb you."

"I was not asleep," replied Matilda; "I could not sleep while I knew you were so unhappy; and—and I was unhappy too."

Juliet hid her face in her handkerchief, and Matilda continued, "I wanted to come to you, but Rupert has been more than usually restless this evening, and when I lay down beside him to try and get him off to sleep, he laid hold of me, and said I should not go; and whenever I attempted to get away, I awoke him. Poor child, sleep is so necessary for him, that I knew I ought to stay beside him."

"O Matilda!" said Juliet, "how kind and good you are, and how you love that little boy! You will never love me again."

Matilda threw her arms round her sister, and pressed her to her. "Dear Juliet," said she, "how can you imagine such a thing! Do you think that even if I had the right to be angry, I should be so cruel and hardhearted as not to forgive?"

"But I have done so very wrong," said Juliet "and I have been so unkind, so untrue to you."

"But you will trust me another time," replied

Matilda; "you will have no more secrets in future?"

"Oh! that I had never had a secret from you," cried Juliet; "you would never have let me act as I have done. I see all my folly now, but I did not heed your warning respecting that deceitful girl, Eliza Moore."

"Eliza has been badly educated," said Matilda, desirous of saying something to calm her sister's excited feelings.

"I have not," said Juliet emphatically; "and I ought to have known better than to have acted in the way I have. You would never have done what I did, Matilda; and I am sure you must think very ill of me."

"I think, dear," replied Matilda, very kindly, "that you will never do anything of the same sort again."

"Oh! never, never!" exclaimed Juliet; "and will you, dearest Matilda, love me again as you used to do? and do you think you can ever trust me as you once did, and put confidence in me?"

Matilda comforted her sister with many kind assurances, and Juliet embracing her, said,

"Then you will not always be suspecting me of being deceitful, and think that, when I go out, I am about some sly trick or underhand transaction?"

She then, at Matilda's request, told her sister what part she had taken in, and all she knew of the late distressing affair; for Matilda had not yet heard the full particulars. Juliet then relieved her mind by relating the history of the secreted songs and book, and amidst many bursts of penitent tears, she declared her sorrow for the past, and her determination never again to be guilty of anything like the conduct, the remembrance of which was now causing her such heartfelt grief.

During this explanation and conversation between

the sisters, they had retired to an ante-room, fearing to wake Rupert; and finding that he still slept, Juliet detained Matilda to talk the painful business over and over again, and it was long past midnight before the two girls separated.

CHAPTER XII.

Return into the Right Path. Diligence in Study. Unpleasant Consequences of Bad Conduct. Consultation concerning a Brother. Play-Fellows. Self-Instruction. The absent Father. Change in a School-Girl. Punishment of Deceit. Neatness and Order. An Untidy Room. Gentle and Graceful Manners. Taken by Surprise. Candour.

If we will but take the trouble of looking a little beyond the surface, we shall find that some good arises out of every evil. It was so with Matilda; unhappy as she was at her sister's improper conduct and its attendant bad consequences, she could not but derive satisfaction from the change that took place in Juliet's behaviour.

Instead of absenting herself from home for hours, as she had lately done, neglecting her own improvement, and throwing an undue share of trouble and labour on Matilda, she was now always in her place, assisting her sister in the care of the house, in attending upon the little ones, and assiduously following her studies and other rational pursuits. She appeared by her strenuous efforts to do right, to be anxious to do all in her power to make some amends for her recent dereliction of duty.

Her former love for her sister seemed to be doubled, and she took no pleasure in anything in which Matilda was not her companion.

Both sisters resumed their wonted studies, and returned to the practice of their accomplishments with increased vigour; and the consequence was, that great improvement was achieved. At first, Matilda could not attend to everything with the same diligence and assiduity as her sister, for Rupert, though daily improving in health and strength, continued for some

weeks to make large demands on her time and attention. No study or employment or recreation of her own would have induced Matilda to neglect her brother; and his bodily comfort and mental improvement were most carefully attended to by her. But her labours were now very much lightened by the willing assistance of Juliet, whose chief pleasure seemed to be the approval and love of her sister.

Poor Juliet needed the support of her sister's affection and approbation, for she was constantly meeting with some mortification or other, arising out of her late improper conduct. Whenever she went out by herself, she was sure to return with some tale of vexation—some one had passed her by with hardly any recognition, or others had crossed to the other side to avoid seeing her; or some had whispered together, or stopped her to ask, in a meaning way, "what the news was?" Some of these slights were imaginary, for, conscious of her recent misdemeanor, Juliet was very sensitive to the behaviour of others towards herself; but there was no mistake when she met the Grahams and Rose Vernon for the first time after their return home, for they all treated her with coolness, and made haste to part from her. It was most painful, too, the meeting with Mrs. Stanley: Juliet hardly dared raise her eyes to that lady, for she felt assured she should read reproof and condemnation in her countenance.

Matilda was with Juliet at the time, and Mrs. Stanley was in her pony-chaise, driving at a foot pace; she nodded to Matilda as she passed, but did not stop to speak, as she generally did.

"There!" exclaimed Juliet, as Mrs. Stanley drove on, "that is my doing; I have lost you, Matilda, Mrs. Stanley's acquaintance. There is no end to the consequences of my folly!" and she burst into tears.

Ann Rushton had heard the history of Miss Bell's secret correspondence, and had been informed of the names of all those who had been concerned in the dis-

graceful affair; but it was from Juliet herself that the old woman was informed of all the particulars, and the share her young friend had taken in it. Juliet talked to Ann repeatedly on the subject when it was freshest in her mind, for the old woman's words, though mixed with censure, seemed to bring consolation with them. Her observations on the business, and her counsels to Juliet as to her future conduct, were very beneficial to the thoughtless and indiscreet girl, and helped to make the work of repentance more lasting, and to prepare the way for a permanent reformation of character.

The advice and opinion of Ann were always listened to with the utmost respect and attention by both girls; and this poor woman, though in humble life, in some measure supplied to them the place of a tender and careful mother.

Matilda was in the habit of talking to Ann on the subject of most of her troubles and difficulties; and now another new one had arisen. It concerned Rupert: the boy, by the beginning of winter, had nearly recovered his usual health and strength, and his illness, instead of having enfeebled the powers of his mind, seemed to have further developed them, and his corporeal frame expanded in proportion. The change for the better that illness had worked in his character, continued in full force now that he was recovered, and besides showing great fondness and aptitude for learning, he was docile and obedient, and kind and pleasant in his manners to all his sisters.

Matilda's influence over him continued unabated, and his love and admiration of her was unbounded. All his former studies had long since been resumed, and, together with new ones, were pursued with diligence. He began French, and read history and travels, and was gaining information on a variety of useful subjects, besides learning all the Latin his elder sister could teach him. Still Matilda was not satisfied; she had read and heard too much not to know that a girl of her age was incompetent to carry on the education of

a clever boy of nearly nine years old; besides which, she wished that he could now and then have playfellows of his own sex. But this she did not think indispensable to her brother's advancement in life, for she remembered to have heard her mamma talk of her brother, who, though reared in solitude, and with no other companion than a younger sister, had turned out one of the noblest and best of characters.

Most of the young ladies of her acquaintance had brothers, but there were none available for her purpose. Her especial friend, Rose Vernon, had a brother; but he was at school, a long way off. In the Graham family there were several boys, but, with the exception of one little fellow of five years of age, they were all older than their sisters. Miss Harris had a brother, and he was a pupil of Mr. Stirling's, the gentleman who kept the preparatory school, that has been already spoken of. Harry Lucas had once been a most unpromising child, awkward, rude, and almost vulgar; but now, as he walked out in company with the other pupils, it was marvellous to see the metamorphosis in him that had taken place.

Matilda often wished that her brother could have the advantage of being placed with Mr. Stirling, and receiving a classical education, besides having the benefit of other instruction from that gentleman; for Mr. Stirling was a conscientious, good man, and had the reputation of bringing his pupils very forward. But this was a thing not to be hoped for, or even thought of, for the boys paid him a high salary. Often when talking to Ann about her brother, the old woman would give Matilda good advice in her management of him, and endeavour to reconcile her to the unavoidable circumstances in which he was placed.

"I do not think, dear Miss Matilda," said Ann one day, when speaking on the subject, "that Master Rupert is doing badly at home; you keep him now from evil company, and I am sure you teach him to love God and strive to do his duty."

"That I do, indeed, Ann," replied Matilda, "and that is what I can do."

"Then your brother," said Ann, "is instructed in the most important business of this life."

"But Ann," urged Matilda, "there is so much a boy ought to learn that I cannot teach him."

"Cannot you make him teach himself?" said Ann.

"How do you mean?" inquired Matilda.

"Many of the first men who ever lived," replied the old woman, "had no other teachers than themselves. In a book your dear mamma once lent me, I read of several of the wisest and best men, who got on to be first-rate characters, who had not half the advantages your brother has."

"We have plenty of books, undoubtedly," said Matilda; "we have all papa's school and college books."

"Many of these men whom I read of," continued Ann, "were poor lads, serving ignorant masters, and had to steal opportunities from their hours of rest and meal-times to study; and, more than that, had to screw money out of their hard earnings to buy books."

"And still they got on," said Matilda cheerfully. "I have read myself of such men, but I had forgotten about them, or rather, it did not strike me to apply the cases to my brother."

"Besides," said Ann, "though perhaps I am not a fit judge in these matters, it seems to me that there is a great deal that a young gentleman would do well to learn besides Latin and Greek."

"You are very right, Ann; and there are many most instructive books that Juliet and I learn from, and Rupert may study them."

"I used," said Ann, "to hear an uncle of mine, who was a sailor, say that in some foreign countries it was much more use to a man if he could speak French and Italian, than if he was the greatest scholar

living. Now, it strikes me that you could bring Master Rupert well on in French, for I used to hear you and your mamma speak that language as fast as you did English; and I used to think how surprising it was to hear you."

"I will certainly pay more attention to Rupert's French," said Matilda. "Juliet and I always talk to each other half the day in that language, for fear we should forget it. Mamma and papa were excellent French scholars.

"And now, Ann, you have spoken so well about Rupert's learning, can you advise me what to do about his play? I mean, his having no boys to have games with."

"And do not you and your sisters have games with the young gentleman?" said Ann, smiling. "I think I have seen you and Miss Juliet play at ball and hoops and battledore as well as any boys could do; and I think I saw you, in the summer, helping your brother to build an arbour; and when Master Rupert wants to climb trees, I dare say it will please him just as well if you stand by and look on, as if you went up the trees along with him."

Matilda laughed, and owned that she was very fond of play; "and now," she said, "that it is winter, we can make snowballs, and amuse ourselves on the ice."

"At any rate, my dear young lady," said Ann, who always entered warmly into all Matilda's troubles, "do not fret about your brother for the present; take an old woman's word for it, he will come to no harm if he goes on as he does now for another year."

"You have given me good advice, dear Ann," said Matilda, "and I will act upon it as well as I can."

"And perhaps," added Ann, "in another year, or may be in a few months, your papa will return home, and make you all happy and comfortable again."

The conversation here changed to the subject of

Mr. Lonsdale's absence from his family. Matilda had not said much about his strange disappearance even to Ann; but the old woman did not require any telling to divine pretty accurately the state of things respecting him, and she very frequently lamented to herself, the unprotected state in which he had left his children. To the children themselves she did not say much, further than to encourage the hope of their papa's speedy return.

It was now the middle of winter. Mr. Lonsdale had left Riverton many months, but still no tidings had been received of him. No one knew where he was gone, nor anything about him, and he ceased to be remembered except by his own family. His children frequently spoke of him, and wondered when he would return. Matilda hoped that he would have written, and almost daily she looked with anxiety for a letter. She longed to know if he was well, happier; and above all she desired to learn when he would return home. Mr. Lonsdale had certainly told her, that the money he had left behind was to serve for a year; still she could not bring herself to believe that he meant to be away all that time, especially as he had never written. Matilda always thought of her father as he had been during the lifetime of her mamma, and as he appeared to her on the evening before his departure; and she felt for him such deep affection as made her painfully feel his absence, and long for his return.

With the exception of this one feeling, and when her anxiety respecting her brother's education was somewhat abated, her days passed tranquilly, and often pleasantly away.

Juliet in time recovered her usual spirits, and was as lively as ever. The impression made upon her by her blamable conduct, and the sorrow consequent upon it, gradually diminished; and though she would never again be likely to commit a similar fault, she was still apt to be giddy and thoughtless. Cir-

cumstances too unfortunately favoured this state of things.

At first she had anticipated with highly painful feelings the mischief that was to accrue to Miss Wright from the ill-conduct that had been practised towards her. The anxious girl watched with beating heart the entrance of Miss Wright's school into church, expecting to see Miss Bell's place vacant; but the young lady was there. Juliet concluded there had not yet been time to get her home, and could draw no comfort from this circumstance; but the next, and every following Sunday up to the Christmas vacation, Miss Bell appeared at church, and Juliet could not but think that Miss Wright had very much exaggerated the extent of the evil that was to befall her; and in this opinion she was confirmed, when, at the end of the vacation, the ill-conducted young lady again appeared sitting beside Miss Wright at church.

Matilda, to whom Juliet communicated her thoughts on the subject, took a very different view of the affair. She surmised that Miss Bell's parents, on hearing an exact statement of all that had taken place respecting their daughter, had acquitted Miss Wright of all blame, except being a little too indulgent; and considered they could not do better than leave their child still in her charge, with orders that the degree of liberty she had hitherto enjoyed, should be withheld, and her money and ornaments taken from her; and Matilda bid Juliet remark, what an entire revolution had taken place in Miss Bell's dress and manner, for she was attired in the plainest possible way, and had a very subdued look.

Juliet, too, no longer found herself slighted or shunned by her former acquaintance, for she was a good-natured girl; and every one thought she would be wiser in future, and they overlooked what was passed.

It appeared likewise, that Mrs. Stanley's passing Juliet and her sister without speaking, was accidental;

for that lady called on the girls soon afterwards, to say good-bye, previous to her going from home for some months.

Miss Moore, happily for the juvenile population of Riverton, had left the place for ever. When the disgraceful transaction in which she had had so large a share, came to the knowledge of her grandmamma, she was exceedingly displeased with her. At the same time she properly blamed herself for the liberty of action she had allowed Eliza, knowing full well that she was not a girl in whom she could place much confidence. To make ample amends, as she said, for all former negligence regarding her grand-daughter, she sent her to school, to be under the "strict surveillance of a lady who was a rigid disciplinarian."

The winter passed without any particular event occurring to the young Lonsdales. Their days were spent in the customary routine of study, recreation, and exercise; needlework of a useful kind, and the small household duties coming in for their share of attention. The young people saw very little of their neighbours, and there was no visiting for them, nor parties of any kind going on at Christmas; for a sprained ankle of Juliet's, and a severe cold and cough of Matilda's, together with an unusually inclement season, confined the elder girls a great deal to the house. Rupert and Kate on fine days amused themselves in playing in the garden, and going on little errands into the town.

"If we have not had much gaiety this winter," said Matilda to Juliet, at the close of a day of more than usual application to their various studies, and also to the cultivation of those accomplishments which shed a grace and a charm over the more serious business of life,—"if we have lived a very retired life, we can look back to our time with tolerable satisfaction."

"I hope so," said Juliet, "as regards us both; but as to you, dear Matilda, I am sure of it; you are improved in everything, but especially in music; I think

you are fit to give lessons to —, to whom shall I say ? "

" Perhaps," interrupted Matilda, " I may be obliged one day to follow as a profession what is now only a pleasant recreation."

" I love music, dearly," said Juliet; " but the idea of having to teach it, is horrible ! "

" You make use of very strong terms, dear Juliet," said Matilda, laughing; " and I do not think you consider it very unpleasant when you teach Rupert and Kate music."

" No; but that is not like being forced to give lessons; paid lessons."

" Still," said Matilda, " perhaps you and I both shall have to maintain ourselves by our talents. We hear nothing from papa, and our money will not hold out beyond the middle of summer."

" Well," said Juliet, somewhat sadly, " it will be time enough to think of that when the period arrives."

" And in the mean time, dear," said Matilda, affectionately putting her arm round her sister, " we will do all we can to improve; shall we not ? "

" Certainly," replied Juliet; " I am willing to be advised by you. But," added she, a moment after, in a livelier tone, " I wish we could have a little more amusement; I wish some one would invite us out. We have not been to a single party this winter."

" Perhaps we shall this spring," said Matilda, entering into her sister's views, and liking the idea herself; " but all our friends knew we could not go out in the winter."

" Well, we are quite recovered now, and all we want is for somebody to send us an invitation," replied Juliet, laughing.

One Monday morning, a short time after the above conversation had taken place between the sisters, Matilda, who was as usual very busy on that day, came to speak to Juliet in the sitting-room where she had

left her after breakfast, preparing, as she thought, to put the room in order, and then to complete some necessary needlework.

"O Matilda!" exclaimed Juliet, on seeing her sister enter, "come here; I do so want you to help me with part of this drawing. I cannot match the colour of the road, the original is of such a peculiar tint."

"Drawing!" said Matilda, as she looked round the disordered room, and then at her sister sitting before her easel.

"I just went to take a peep," replied Juliet, "at my Saturday's work, to see how it looked; and then I went to give two or three touches I saw were much wanted; and—"

"And you forgot everything else," said Matilda, smiling, yet at the same time refusing to advise her sister while there was so much that was necessary to be done first.

"Oh, do not refuse, dear," said Juliet, in a coaxing tone; "if you will only come here for a minute, and put in this little piece of road for me, the drawing will be finished; and then I can return the original, which I have kept such an unconscionable length of time."

"It cannot make much difference," said Matilda, "if you keep the drawing one day longer, as you have already detained it so long. To-morrow I will help you with pleasure; but to-day I really am too busy—besides, look what a state the room is in."

"Never mind the room just now, dearest," said Juliet; "when you have done this little touch for me, I will put the room in order, and I will set about helping you, and will get everything done so fast, I shall astonish you. Now only look here one moment," and she drew her sister towards her drawing, and taking up a brush, she put it into her hand and endeavoured to pull her on to the seat."

"Your drawing looks very well," said Matilda; "I did not think you had got it near so forward; you must

have worked hard when I was out on Saturday afternoon."

"I did indeed," said Juliet; "and I meant to have surprised you by showing it you finished; but I cannot get on without your help. Now, dear, just do what I ask: you will oblige me very much; it will not take long."

"But," said Matilda, "suppose any one should call while I am thus engaged? I had no idea you would let the room be in such a state."

"Oh! nobody will call," replied Juliet, who had contrived to seat her sister before the drawing, and was supplying her with colours; "nobody ever does call now."

"You forget," replied Matilda, who, always wishing to be obliging, was mixing the tint for the road, "that two ladies called last week when we were out, and Rose Vernon also; and she left word that she would come again in a day or two."

"Well, she will not be here so early," said Juliet, well pleased to have carried her point, "nor any one else at this hour; and as to Rose, I do not mind her any more than one of ourselves."

"I do though," said Matilda; "do you not recollect the conversation we heard not very long ago, between her and Mrs. Vernon, on the subject of neatness and order?"

"Yes," replied Juliet; "Rose was saying she did not like a room to look so prim and precise, that a feather even lying about would seem to discompose its neatness."

"That was in allusion to Mrs. Worrel's formal drawing-room," observed Matilda, "which is always arranged in a way that no one of taste can like. But Mrs. Vernon alluded to untidiness; and said it was not only unpleasant, but unladylike for girls to suffer the room they inhabit to be strewed with litters, and kept in a state of confusion. She added, that she thought the mind was not well regulated when that was the case."

"Ah!" said Juliet, laughing, "Mrs. Vernon never knew the enthusiasm of an artist, nor how drawing carries one away. You have done that road delightfully, dear Matilda! Now one little touch to those figures; they look too smooth."

"Rags are picturesque in a *picture*," said Matilda, archly, and fixing her eyes on her sister.

"Oh! you are thinking of my torn collar," said Juliet, blushing, and clapping her hand on to her throat. "You recommended my changing it, I know, when we were at breakfast; and I meant to have done so, and to have made my hair neat, which had got tumbled when I was hunting for my hen's eggs."

"Poor mamma used to say," observed Matilda, "that it is always best to do a thing of that kind directly, and then it is not forgotten."

"I meant to do so," said Juliet, half-sighing. "How neat and nice you always are, Matilda!"

"I am glad you think so," said Matilda, smiling kindly at her sister.

"Yes, you are," continued Juliet; "and I remember something more Mrs. Vernon said that same day. Shall I repeat it?"

"Do," said Matilda.

"Mrs. Vernon said," replied Juliet, "that it was incumbent on a woman always to be neatly and appropriately dressed."

"I remember," said Matilda; "and she added, that it was part of woman's mission to cultivate those arts which soften and adorn society."

"And strive to acquire gentle and graceful manners," said Juliet.

"And," continued her sister, "to keep in the background, as much as possible, all that is unpleasant to the sight, and offends against good taste."

"Right," exclaimed Juliet; "there, I think, between us, we have remembered pretty well all that Mrs. Vernon preached."

"And now for the practice," said Matilda, starting

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up; "your drawing is done, and we will set about making our room a little more fit to be seen."

"Visiters!" cried Kate, who was standing by the window.

"Mrs. Stanley," said Rupert, running into the room; "I saw her driving up in her pony-chaise. I was by the staircase window." At the same moment a loud knock at the street-door confirmed the children's news.

"Oh! what shall we do?" exclaimed Juliet, running about, snatching up one misplaced article and then another, and striving to find a hiding-place for them; while Matilda caught up a soiled apron of Juliet's, and a dirty pinafore of Kate's, which the giddy girl had brought down to mend.

But it was impossible to give the room a tidy air. The hearth was littered with pieces of egg-shell, which Juliet had carelessly thrown there after the feast she had provided through the means of her hen. The carpet was strewn with the contents of Juliet's work-basket, which she had overturned when hastening to her drawing; a pot of paste, and scraps of paper, with which she had been mending music before breakfast, were standing on a chair; while on another stood a broken water-jug, which she had fetched in haste to supply her painting-glass. The breakfast-cloth was left hanging over the sofa, and the sauce-pan which had been used to boil the eggs, was in the fender, and Rupert was escaping with it to the kitchen, at the same moment that Juliet, in striving to twitch the table-cover even, upset a vase, flowers, water, and all, just as Mrs. Stanley, followed by a young lady, entered the room.

Matilda felt very much annoyed; but recovering her presence of mind, she received her visiters in a composed and ladylike manner; while Juliet, confused and colouring, remained fixed to the spot where she was standing.

"We are very early visiters," said Mrs. Stanley,

holding out her hand to Juliet after she had returned Matilda's salutation: "too early; I fear we disturb you;" and looking at the overturned vase, she added, "we have occasioned mischief, too, I see; let me help repair it;" and setting up the vase, she began goodnaturedly replacing the flowers.

Juliet, reassured by Mrs. Stanley's manner, recovered from her embarrassment; and thinking how vexed Matilda must be to have had the ladies shown into such a disordered room, and that it was unfair that she should have any part of the discredit attached to it, replied to Mrs. Stanley—

"You are not at all too early,—it is I that am too late; I really am ashamed you should see such a room as this. It is all my fault, my negligence, for when Matilda went away, I sat down to my drawing and forgot all about my share of putting in order."

"Never mind," said Mrs. Stanley, smiling; "drawing is a fascinating occupation. May we look at what you have been about?" and she walked to the other end of the room, where she busied herself for two or three minutes, looking at some of Juliet's drawings, while Matilda took the opportunity of ringing for Harriet to wipe away the wet from the table, and to carry off a few of the misplaced articles.

Mrs. Stanley appeared pleased with the drawings, and so did her young friend, whom the elder lady said, drew very well; and that she was going to take her a drive to show her the country, and this occasioned the earliness of their call.

The purport of the visit was to invite Matilda and Juliet to pass the following evening at Beachwoods; Mrs. Stanley having asked a few friends, in order to amuse the young lady who was staying with her.

When the ladies had driven off, and the sisters were left alone, Juliet burst forth into long and loud lamentations on her unfortunate heedlessness, protesting, at the same time, that she never would again be so careless, and that, for the future, she

would not sit down to amuse herself, till she had seen that the room was in a fit state for the reception of visiters.

"You are very kind, dear Matilda," said she, "not to blame me."

"It would be too much," said Matilda, laughing, "if I were to say anything when you so greatly condemn yourself. If you will only, dear Juliet, try to acquire the habit of doing what you say, I shall not regret that we were caught in what Mrs. Vernon would no doubt consider a very unladylike state of disorder."

"I will indeed," said Juliet, "adhere to my resolution: I *will* be more careful and orderly."

"That is right," said Matilda; "and now we can enjoy the thought of, and talk about our visit of to-morrow."

"To be sure we can," said Juliet, gaily skipping about the room. "I am quite delighted at the idea of going out again. I wonder who will be at the party."

CHAPTER XIII.

Visit to Beachwoods. Mrs. Stirling. Important Results of a Visit. An Anxious Mother. Teaching Music. A Happy Event. Perverse Tempers. Perseverance in a Good Cause. Disagreeable Manners. False Accusation. Acting with Spirit. Doubts respecting Hasty Conduct. An Interesting Group. Acknowledgment of Error. Pride. Watchfulness of Conduct.

THE sisters enjoyed their visit to Mrs. Stanley; and, perhaps, all the more for having been so long shut up with little or no other society than that of themselves and a visit about Christmas time, from their humble friend Ann Rushton. The party did not differ in any essential respect from many others of the kind. There was music, books, drawings, and prints to look at; and some amusing games were played at by the juveniles, of whom the company chiefly consisted. But the evening was productive of an event which had a considerable influence on the Lonsdale family.

Among Mrs. Stanley's guests was Mrs. Stirling, of whom it will be necessary to say a few words. This lady was recently married to the worthy gentleman of whom mention has been already made. Mrs. Stirling at the time of her marriage was a widow, with two daughters, twelve and thirteen years of age, and two little boys, who were under the care of Mr. Stirling.

Major Bower, Mrs. Stirling's first husband, had died in India, about a year ago, and in a letter which his widow brought to England, he commended her and his children to the especial care of his former friend, Mr. Stirling; at the same time appointing him trustee for his widow and children.

On receipt of Major Bower's letter, Mr. Stirling hastened to fulfil his friend's dying request; but he was

distressed to find that the affairs he was intrusted with, were in a very embarrassed state, and that a miserable pittance would be all that would fall to the lot of the widow and her children.

Mr. Stirling had always heard a high character of Mrs. Bower; and in all his transactions with her she showed herself in so admirable a light, that she won his esteem and regard, and, after a time, he prevailed upon her to become his wife.

Before Mrs. Stirling left England with her first husband, she had been an intimate friend of Mrs. Stanley's, and the two ladies were happy to find themselves again neighbours.

On the evening just alluded to, Mrs. Stirling was unexpectedly obliged to return home early; but on the following morning she called on Mrs. Stanley, and, among other things, she spoke of her friend's guests of the night before. After having mentioned one or two girls, whose names she knew, she said—

"I want you to tell me the name of a young lady whom I especially remarked; she was particularly ladylike in her appearance; and her manners were strikingly elegant."

"Did she play?" inquired Mrs. Stanley.

"Remarkably well!" was the reply.

"Played well, and was striking in her appearance," repeated Mrs. Stanley: "you must mean Miss Caroline Dashwood, I think?"

"Oh no! not her," said Mrs. Stirling: "Miss Caroline Dashwood was by no means pleasing in her manners, according to my notions; for when she was requested to play, she pushed aside a little girl who had been doing her best at the pianoforte, saying, 'There, that will do, you have made noise enough; go away.'"

"Poor child! that was little Minny Clayton, I dare say; I asked her myself to play, to give her a little confidence."

"I do not know the child's name," said Mrs. Stirling; "but my heroine, seeing her look disconcerted, went up to her, and led her away, and spoke very kindly to her, and amused her for some time, showing her prints and explaining them to her."

"That must be Matilda Lonsdale, I am sure," said Mrs. Stanley; "it is just like her to have noticed the discomfited child. I cannot think how it was I did not name her at first. She plays well, and is indeed a very graceful girl."

"And amiable surely; or there is no truth in the expression of a countenance?" said Mrs. Stirling. "Tell me about her."

Mrs. Stanley, in compliance with her friend's request, stated some of the particulars respecting the Lonsdales, with which the reader is acquainted.

As regarded Mr. Lonsdale's absence, or his probable return, she knew nothing positive; and she could only conjecture the circumstances in which he had left his family, and that these were not affluent, it was but too evident, from many little circumstances that transpired, notwithstanding all the girls' prudence and caution in never divulging family affairs.

"What would I give," exclaimed Mrs. Stirling, "to have my daughters grow up like Miss Lonsdale! How charming it would be, too, to have them play as she does! My girls are fond of music, and have a good deal of taste for it; but they have not made the progress at school I hoped they would."

"You intend now, I think," said Mrs. Stanley, "to educate your daughters at home."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Stirling; "I shall be glad to keep them with me; besides, a good school would be too expensive. I should like a good music-master for them, but that is out of the question; I should never think of proposing such a thing to my generous husband."

"Mr. Stirling as well as yourself," said Mrs. Stanley, "is, I think, very fond of music?"

"He is," replied her friend. "Miss Lonsdale would make a delightful companion for my girls; I should like to have her a great deal at my house. Will you introduce me to her?"

"With pleasure," answered Mrs. Stanley; "I will take you to call on my young friend this morning."

Rhoda and Alice Bower had been separated from their mother for many years; for, as is generally the case with English children born in India, they had been sent home and placed at school. Unfortunately, a bad choice was made, for the lady at the head of the establishment where these girls were sent for education, paid but little attention to the moral and religious training of her pupils, and except a girl showed decided marks of talent, little pains were taken to bring her forward.

All a mother's love could not prevent Mrs. Stirling from perceiving that her daughters were very far from being what she wished in many respects; but she trusted to time and a parent's assiduous care to cause them to grow up good, amiable, and accomplished. With these views fully in her mind, Mrs. Stirling was very desirous to secure the acquaintance of such a girl as Matilda Lonsdale.

Juliet, this lady appeared not to have seen, or else to have overlooked, and when Mrs. Stanley called to introduce her friend, it so happened that only the elder sister was at home; and an invitation to spend the following day at Mrs. Stirling's, was given to Matilda alone.

Matilda's company gave very general pleasure and satisfaction, and she was invited, again and again, to repeat her visits. But it afforded Matilda little pleasure to go where her sister did not accompany her, neither did she like being separated so much from the children at home.

Besides which, though she was pleased with both Mr. and Mrs. Stirling, the young ladies were very

little to her taste, and she was meditating how she could excuse herself from such frequent visits, when, one day, after she had been playing on the pianoforte, greatly to the admiration of her listeners, Mrs. Stirling said—

"How I wish you would make my girls play so! Could I induce you to give them some lessons? I would give you some nice presents in return, if you would—some valuables I brought with me from India. Do; you would not lose by the exchange."

"I am much obliged to you," replied Matilda, "but I have no time to spare; I am so much wanted at home, and have a great deal of teaching there."

Mrs. Stirling looked disappointed, and inquired whom Matilda taught.

"I have a little sister," replied the young girl, "who occupies part of my time; but it is my brother who engages most of my attention."

"He is younger than you, I suppose?" said Mrs. Stirling, in a tone of inquiry.

Matilda replied that he was much younger; but she added that "he is so quick and clever, that I have to follow boys' studies a good deal myself, to keep forward enough to teach him."

"I suppose, by what you say, you are anxious for your brother's improvement?"

"Most anxious," replied Matilda.

Here the conversation dropped, for Mrs. Stirling became silent and abstracted.

On the following morning, as Matilda was occupied in hearing her brother his Latin lessons, Mrs. Stirling was announced, and she entered the room with a cheerful and animated air, as though she had something pleasant on her mind.

"I am come," said the lady, as she seated herself, at Matilda's request, "to make a proposition to you. It entered my head when I was talking to you yesterday, just before your departure; but I would say nothing then, as I had to speak first to my good husband."

Matilda was all attention.

"It concerns your brother," said Mrs. Stirling; "whom I perceive you are diligently teaching, and about whose improvement you expressed yourself very anxious. I am about to propose a change of instruction; it is this: that your brother shall receive his education from Mr. Stirling, if you will give my daughters lessons in music. Mr. Stirling sanctions this plan, and will devote as much of his time and attention to the little boy as if he received a salary for him. What do you say?"

"That I am most thankful for such a happy opportunity of my brother being well educated," said Matilda, the tears starting into her eyes with pleasurable emotion, at the unexpected accomplishment of one of the first wishes of her heart; "and," continued she, struggling to speak with composure, "that I will do all in my power to improve your daughters in music. Indeed, I do not think that I can make a sufficient return for the great benefit my brother will receive."

"You will remember," said Mrs. Stirling, kindly regarding the agitated girl, "that it will fall to your share of the bargain to have two to teach."

"I shall undertake my part most cheerfully," said Matilda.

"As you will have double duty," continued Mrs. Stirling, "it is but fair that you should only teach every other day; besides which, I fear my girls have not sufficient energy to be willing to receive a lesson oftener. They practise certainly every day, and must continue to do so even more; but that is not like having the attention constantly fixed as it is while under the instruction of a mistress such as you, I know, will be."

The days and hours were then arranged for Matilda to give her lessons. It was settled that she was to be at Mrs. Stirling's by nine o'clock in the morning, and give each of the girls an hour's instruction.

Just before Mr. Stirling's marriage, he had removed

to a house half a mile from the town; and, as a good deal of time would be occupied in walking backwards and forwards, it was settled between Mrs. Stirling and her young friend that, on Fridays, the day of the last weekly lessons, the Misses Bower should come to Matilda; for they would be at Riverton on that day to join a German class.

This was an agreeable arrangement for Matilda, as it would take her less from home; at the same time, she felt that she would gladly make any sacrifice of her own convenience for the welfare of her brother.

Rupert would walk with his sister in the morning, and remain till three o'clock in the afternoon; but his attendance at Mr. Stirling's was to be daily; and Matilda saw no objection to his going there alone, for she felt sure that he would never conduct himself improperly as he went and returned from school.

The boy was now fixed in good principles, and felt the importance of behaving like a young gentleman. It was fortunate, too, for him, that his associates were, generally speaking, well-disposed and tractable boys. It would have been hard upon the master if they had not been so, for he was a zealous instructor and a good Christian.

Rupert was aware of the advantages that were now opened to him, and, by diligence and good conduct, he did his best to profit by them. He soon won the approbation of his master, and the love of his companions; and his improvement in his studies was rapid.

All this was very gratifying to Matilda, and she needed something to cheer her in her arduous undertaking. It would not, at first sight, appear that teaching two girls music, for an hour each, three times a week, was a very hard task; but Rhoda and Alice Bower were not an ordinary description of persons. Their minds, tempers, and manners, had been so spoiled and mismanaged at school, that Matilda found it not *only a difficult* but a painful business, the endeavour to

make them learn of her. When Matilda was only a visiter, the eldest Miss Bower appeared to like her; but directly she assumed the character of a teacher, an entire change took place in her behaviour. Instead of showing anything like a teachable disposition, Rhoda became dogged, obstinate, and sullen, and appeared to take pleasure in thwarting her gentle instructress. Sometimes in a very short passage, when Matilda had pointed out an error, she would persist in continuing it, although Matilda, with infinite patience, would hear her go over it twenty times. Occasionally, if told of what was wrong, this perverse girl would refuse to strike a note, and sit in sullen silence, while Matilda, by gentle admonition and persuasion, was using her utmost endeavours to induce her to continue her lesson. Then again, if requested to play *piano*, she would play *forte*, and *vice versâ*. This was a very annoying state of things to one so highly conscientious as Matilda, for she felt that her pupil was gaining no ground, while her brother was deriving great improvement from his share in the arrangement. And what particularly annoyed Matilda was, that Miss Bower, whenever her mother was by, would appear so attentive and desirous to learn, that the poor teacher felt that the lack of improvement in her pupil would be placed to the wrong account—insufficiency in the mistress, and not incapacity in the pupil.

With Alice, Matilda had not much better success, for she could not induce her to apply; and the chief part of the time, which ought to have been occupied in study, was passed in folly.

Sometimes Alice would lose her time in hunting through books for something she said she wished to learn; at others, she would begin and play a few bars of a piece of music, then leave off, and insist upon Matilda's playing to her, when, no sooner was the mistress seated at the instrument, than she was ordered up again. If Matilda looked grave and remonstrated, Alice would laugh, or mock her, or ridicule her woman-

ish airs, as she called them. Sometimes this flighty young lady would be seized with an apparent fit of diligence, and, placing her foot on the open pedal, play on with the most determined perseverance through pages of music with which she was wholly unacquainted, striking the notes at random, and wholly regardless of time. But Alice's great desire was to occupy the hour of her lesson in relating anecdotes of her school life, and telling, with high glee, histories of imposition and deceit practised on the governess and teachers.

Matilda would have objected to having the time occupied with any kind of conversation, but to have the hour of study thus wasted, and her own sense of right offended by tales of this kind, was perfectly revolting to her; and assuming a firmness of manner, of which Alice did not think her capable, she peremptorily desired the foolish and ill-judging girl to abstain entirely for the future from speaking to her on such subjects.

But if the lessons proceeded thus badly at home, it was still worse when the young ladies received their instruction at Matilda's house. Sometimes the girls did not arrive till within a few minutes of the time their mamma expected them back, preferring to pass the hours that ought to have been devoted to music in shopping, or idling about the town. At other times, when it suited them to be with Matilda at the appointed hour, they would annoy her in a variety of ways, and not only her, but Juliet also. They were rude, impertinent, and inquisitive, frequently making unpleasant observations, and asking questions regarding matters that did not in the least concern them. Sometimes they would be very familiar, and at other times haughty and reserved in their manners towards the Lonsdales. Juliet's forbearance was often severely taxed, and occasionally a sharp reproof, or a contemptuous expression, would escape her; and she was now and then so irritated at the Miss Bowers' behaviour to her sister, that, in order to restrain her dis-

pleasure within the bounds of moderation, she would make her escape out of the room.

Frequently after the departure of these ill-conducted girls, Matilda and Juliet would discuss the unpleasant and irksome task the former had undertaken; and Juliet, in the warmth of her excited feelings, would urge her sister to give it up; but Matilda would call to mind the benefit her brother was receiving from Mr. Stirling's instructions, and for his sake resolve to persevere. But it was a hard trial, and sometimes as she was walking home from her unsatisfactory and painful employment, she would turn aside into some retired lane or lonely meadow, and, unseen and unheard, give vent to her oppressed feelings by a flood of tears. These "foolish tears," as the poor girl sometimes called them, were occasionally productive of benefit; for after having given way to a burst of sorrow, she would argue with herself, and reflect that, after all, it was no real hardship she had to undergo; that she had not to suffer personal injury, nor to endure bodily pain; and that she ought not to suffer herself to be so depressed, but to make up her mind to endure, calmly and patiently, evils that were not of a worse character than the present. She schooled herself, too, not to give way to impatience under provocation, and not to shrink from the performance of her duty, because she saw no good results arising from it.

It often crossed this young girl's mind, whether it would not be her wisest plan to acquaint Mrs. Stirling with the improper behaviour of her daughters, and tell her that unless there was a change in their manner of conducting themselves, very little improvement could possibly arise from her tuition; but Matilda was withheld from making any complaints by not knowing how they might be received. She feared that it would do no good, and only offend, and that Rupert would in consequence be turned away from school. Another cause, after a time, operated to prevent her speaking, namely, that Mrs. Stirling became ill, and was for many

weeks entirely confined to her sick chamber, and when at last she made her occasional appearance in the room where her daughters received their music-lessons, she seemed to be still suffering so much, that Matilda had not the heart to afflict her with disagreeable intelligence.

Among other unpleasant tricks that Matilda had to bear from her pupils, was a habit they had of frequently eating cakes or tarts during their lesson; and in the fruit season they were seldom without a supply lying by them. The poor instructress, who, by the way, was never invited to take a part of what her pupils were eating, remonstrated against the practice, and pointed out the injury likely to accrue to the pianoforte from dropping crumbs or portions of fruit on the keys; but she spoke in vain.

One morning, when Alice was taking her lesson, Mrs. Stirling came into the room, saying that she was going to take a drive for the benefit of her health, and that Alice should go with her, if her lesson was nearly over. Alice, who liked a drive into the country better than most things, cried out immediately that she was ready to go.

"But," said Mrs. Stirling, "what says the young mistress?"

Matilda was about to reply that Alice had not yet been with her a quarter of an hour, when she stopped short, her attention being attracted to a jog of the elbow from her pupil, and a hard winking of one eye.

"What say you, how is the lesson?" continued Mrs. Stirling.

"Oh! just done," exclaimed Alice, while Matilda rose to look at the clock over the mantelpiece; and she was about to proclaim the hour, and state how long her pupil had been with her, when the winking of the eye was redoubled, and Alice exclaimed,—

"My lesson is all over."

Matilda for a moment was silent from surprise, but, quickly recovering herself, she said,—

"I do not know why you wink your eye at me in that way, Alice; I cannot join you in saying the thing that is not; you know you have not taken more than a quarter of the lesson."

"Oh! I was only in fun," said Alice, colouring, and endeavouring to laugh.

"This is something too serious for a joke," said Mrs. Stirling, and, quitting the room, she drove off without her daughter.

Alice did not recover herself that morning, and after giving Matilda more than usual trouble, she abruptly rose, saying she would not play any more that morning, and ran off into the garden.

The next time that Matilda came to give her music lessons, Alice, who had been severely reprimanded by her mamma for her desire to deceive, was more than usually disagreeable in her manners, and she made no attempt at concealing her displeasure towards her instructress, attributing the reproof she had met with to Matilda's not choosing to connive at her deceit, and thus depriving her of a great pleasure.

Rhoda took her lesson first, and went away, saying she would send her sister; but Matilda waited a long while before Alice appeared, when she entered from the garden with her lap full of delicious ripe nectarines, which she deposited on the pianoforte, counting the number as she laid them down. There were ten, and five she placed within her reach to eat during her lesson. When the hour was up, Matilda went into another room to speak to Mrs. Stirling about some music which that lady was going to purchase, and on her return to put on her bonnet and mantle, she found Rupert waiting for her in the room where the pianoforte stood. He said that he had a bad headache, and that Mr. Stirling advised him to return home with his sister. He was alone in the room, and sitting leaning his head on his hand.

Matilda hastily equipped herself for her walk, and she and her brother were just setting off, when Alice

returned into the room, and missing one of the five remaining nectarines, she immediately taxed Rupert with having taken it.

The boy coloured with indignation at such a charge being brought against him, and declared he had not touched the fruit.

"You have," said Alice, rudely; "you have been here by yourself for these five minutes, and have eaten it."

"If my brother had been here five hours," said Matilda, warmly, "he would not have been guilty of so mean an action."

"Your brother is no better than other boys, nor you better than other girls, for all you are so full of cant and think so highly of yourself," exclaimed Alice, who, angry with Matilda, sought to mortify her through her brother, whose education she knew had been an object of first-rate care and consideration with his sister.

Rupert, who was now offended through the attack made upon Matilda, as well as himself, rose strongly in her defence, and repeated that she was the best girl in the world, and that she had brought him up to be true and just, and to hate all deceit.

The word deceit grated most unpleasantly on Alice's ears, and she cried out,

"So she has been telling fine tales of me, this perfect sister of yours. Well, it is a pity she did not teach you to be honest, and let other people's property alone."

"I never touched your fruit," said Rupert, "and if you dare say so, I will—"

"Tell of me, will you not?" interrupted Alice; "but who," added she, sneeringly, "will believe you?"

Rupert answered angrily, and Alice did not hesitate to apply to him some very offensive epithets, impugning both his truth and honesty, when Matilda put a sudden stop to the stormy conversation by calling *out,*—

"Here is your nectarine, Alice; it was lying among the music. You pushed it aside yourself, no doubt, when you were hunting for the song I said you had better not learn."

"Where is it?" said Alice, unwilling to be convinced.

"Here," said Matilda, pulling forward the five nectarines; "one, two, three, four, five; there they are."

"Yes; there they are," repeated Rupert. "And do you, Miss Alice, be rather more certain next time of what you say, when you accuse another in the way you have done me. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for having called me such names as you did."

"Ashamed," cried Alice, "of anything I said to a little insignificant boy like you! Ashamed, indeed! If you do not deserve it this time, you will another."

"Oh, Alice!" exclaimed Matilda, greatly excited, "what can you mean by saying so?"

"Exactly what I have said," replied Alice, colouring with anger.

"It is cruel and shameful behaviour," said Matilda, and seizing her brother by the hand, she pulled him on, saying,—

"Come away, Rupert; you and I will never enter this house again."

A week passed, and all communication between the two families, the Stirlings and the Lonsdales, appeared at an end.

During the first few days of her freedom, and while her sense of ill-treatment was strong upon her, Matilda rejoiced that she had acted with a proper spirit, and had shown, by removing her brother from Mr. Stirling's, and from ceasing to go there herself, a just sense of the indignity that had been put upon them both. But as days passed on, and her angry feelings subsided, she began to reflect upon her conduct, and consider whether she had acted either wisely or well. One thing was very certain—Rupert's school education was stopped; and very soon something like a

sharp pang of regret shot through her mind, as she saw the boy day after day pursuing his studies with no better teacher than herself. Then, as regarded herself more particularly, she considered if her behaviour had been judicious. Her conscience would not acquit her; and in the height of her repentant feelings, she accused herself of having given way to an impulse of ungoverned temper, nearly as reprehensible as that Alice had shown.

Matilda reflected that Alice laboured under great disadvantages of education, while she had been taught from infancy to put a restraint upon herself, and to check all angry emotions as they rose, and to return good for evil.

Now that the provocation no longer existed, Matilda saw the matter in a very different light, and she felt that she should have done her duty far better if, instead of carrying Rupert off in the way she had done, she had contented herself with gentle expostulations, and the assurance that her brother would not take what was not his own.

It is very probable, and so Matilda thought, that nothing she could say would have checked Alice in her determination to accuse Rupert falsely; but then, how much better it would have been to have stated the circumstances of the case quietly to either Mrs. or Mr. Stirling, who, now that she could think calmly, she felt assured would believe her brother innocent of the charge brought against him.

In the mean time, as the days went on, and neither Matilda nor Rupert came, Mr. and Mrs. Stirling wondered what was the reason that detained them at home, and at last, fearing that Rupert was ill, Mrs. Stirling desired Alice (Rhoda was gone on a visit to a relation) to call and inquire if anything was the matter. Now this was about the last thing the young lady was desirous of doing, and she returned home more than once without having called at the Lonsdales.

"I wish, my dear," said her mamma, "you would

have remembered my order. The little boy went home unwell, and I feel uneasy lest he should be ill. It must, I am sure, be something serious that keeps Matilda away; she has always been most punctual in her attendance. Here comes your brother," continued Mrs. Stirling, as her eldest son entered the room; "I will send him to make inquiries concerning our young friends this afternoon."

"Alfred, my dear," said his mamma, "I wish you would go to Riverton after school, and inquire if Master Lonsdale is ill."

"He is not ill, mamma," replied Alfred; "I saw him in the town this morning, when I went to the post."

"Not ill," said Mrs. Stirling; "then why does he not attend at school?"

Alice offended him the last time he was here; she called him a thief, and his sister would not let him come to our house again.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Stirling, "explain children; let me hear all that passed;" and after a great deal of questioning to Alice, and a clear statement of the facts, as far as he knew, from Alfred, Mrs. Stirling at last gathered a tolerably accurate notion of what had passed; except that her daughter declared that Matilda had been very rude and impertinent, and that Rupert was not fit to be trusted where any temptation was in the way.

"*I* would trust him," said Alfred, "with anything of mine. He is a good boy; and whenever papa wants to be told anything very exactly among the boys, he always says, 'Let Lonsdale speak, I shall be sure to hear the truth from him.'"

"This is a very serious business," said Mrs. Stirling, "I must inquire into it, and I hope I shall not find you much to blame, Alice; if I do, it will cause me to be very much displeased with you. Under any circumstances the terms you applied to Rupert Lonsdale were very unladylike. I will drive into town, and call on the Lonsdales, and I shall be very much

disappointed if I find Matilda has been behaving unbecomingly."

It was not till late in the afternoon that Mrs. Stirling was able to fulfil her intention of paying a visit to Matilda. When she arrived at the house the servant was outside, and Mrs. Stirling entered without knocking; and hearing sounds of music issue from the parlour, she pushed open the door which stood ajar, and stepped gently in without being perceived, and took a seat at the far end of the room. The two elder girls, with Rupert, were singing a hymn arranged for three voices, and as they were grouped round the pianoforte, they presented in the eye of a mother an interesting sight. Juliet played the accompaniment, while Matilda and Rupert stood on one side of her, and on the other, close up to the instrument, was Kate, who held a dove in her arms, which, in the excitement produced by listening to the harmonious strains, she pressed close to her. Rupert gently beat time, and Matilda, with one hand lightly resting on the pianoforte, and the other pressed on the shoulder of her brother, appeared absorbed in the devotional character of the music. She looked pale, and her countenance bore the mark of recent tears.

As Mrs. Stirling sat an unobserved spectator, she glanced from the singers round the room, and remarked the good order in which it was kept; at the same time that she saw the recent employments of its inhabitants. On the middle table lay Rupert's school-books, open; a small work-box well filled with working implements, and a frock Juliet was making for Kate lay on one side; a vase with flowers stood in the middle, and a few books were scattered about, as though they had been recently used. At the bottom of the room was an easel and other drawing apparatus, and on a chair close by was placed a landscape lately finished. Everything evinced good taste and order; nor did the attire of the girls pass without notice by Mrs. Stirling. Their hair was simply and

Matilda, Rupert, and Juliet, amusing themselves.—P. 198.

neatly arranged, and they were clad in dark dresses, plainly made and fitting well; the sombre hue of the material enlivened by white cuffs and collars. Rupert wore a summer blouse, of Matilda's making. Mrs. Stirling listened to the words that were sung, which being pretty plainly articulated, she made out to be those of a hymn expressive of repentance of misdeeds, and an earnest appeal to Divine Majesty for forgiveness. Towards the conclusion, Matilda pressed her hands fervently together, and raised her eyes upwards as though seeking communion with the Searcher of all hearts, whom in her inmost soul she feared her late conduct had offended.

When the music was concluded she bent down, and kissing her brother's forehead, softly said,

"Dear Rupert, I have done you much injury."

The boy threw his arms round his sister, and was about to utter some affectionate expression towards her, when an exclamation of surprise from Kate at seeing Mrs. Stirling seated in the room, drew the attention of the young party to her.

Mrs. Stirling was so completely lost in thought—the subject of her meditations being a comparison between the girls before her and her own ill-educated daughters—that when Kate spoke she almost started, and looked up with an abstracted air, but in a moment, feeling that an apology was necessary for her intrusion, she briefly stated that hearing sweet voices singing, she was unwilling to interrupt the harmony, and had waited till it ceased before she stated the object of her visit.

"I came, my dear Matilda," said the lady, cordially shaking the young girl by the hand, "to seek an explanation from you as to the cause of you and your brother's absenting yourselves from my house, and if, as I fear, you have experienced rude behaviour from any part of my family, to offer you an apology."

"Oh! Mrs. Stirling," exclaimed Matilda, "you are very good to come here again; I have not behaved as

I ought. I gave way to angry feelings, and resented far too deeply what was said by Alice to my brother. I have been very unhappy almost ever since; I—" here Matilda's voice failed her, for overcome with the emotions she had experienced while singing, and then the transition to joy, she was unable to say more; and it was not without a strong effort over herself, that after a time she stammered out some sentences which would have been almost unintelligible to one less interested than Mrs. Stirling, about having herself had the advantage of a mother's care, while Alice had been separated almost from infancy from hers; and she repeated that she ought to have made more allowance for the young lady, and not have deprived her brother of the excellent opportunity afforded for his education.

Mrs. Stirling was much pleased with Matilda's candour, and was grieved, upon more fully learning the particulars of the affair, to find how much to blame her daughter had been.

While still talking the matter over, Matilda was called away for a short time to answer a note of importance, and during her absence, Juliet, who had always wished that Mrs. Stirling should be apprised of the behaviour of her daughters, took the opportunity of stating the manner in which they conducted themselves during their music lessons; and added, that it was impossible that Matilda could improve them much, while they paid so little attention to her instructions, and treated all her advice with such perfect indifference.

Mrs. Stirling said but little in reply to this communication, but she appeared greatly pained; and on Matilda's coming back she shortly took her leave, it being first arranged that Rupert should return to school, and that Matilda would resume her instruction to Rhoda and Alice.

Juliet's communication did Matilda good service, as for the future Mrs. Stirling always sat in the room during the music lessons, and when she could

not accompany her daughters to Riverton she did not permit them to go to the Lonsdales' house alone, so that it occasionally happened that Matilda got one day's reprieve from her irksome task.

The evening after Mrs. Stirling's visit, the young Lonsdales walked to Broomheath, for Matilda wanted to tell Mrs. Rushton of the turn the business had taken; her old friend having been informed of all that had before passed relative to Rupert, and of Matilda's behaviour in consequence.

"I am very much relieved in my mind, dear Ann," said the young girl, after she had told the result of Mrs. Stirling's call; "but I wish I could avoid acting so injudiciously another time. Can you advise me?"

"I can only say, my dear," replied her old friend, "that you must take more pains to be on your guard against giving way to angry feelings as they rise."

"But," said Juliet, "Matilda had such provocation. Alice's words were so hurting to her pride."

"Ah! my dear Miss Juliet," said Ann, "you have just explained how it was that your sister came to act as she did."

"My pride," suggested Matilda, "ought not to have been hurt."

"Nor would it," said Ann, "if you had reflected, as you have since done, who it was that offended you; or if you had stopped and asked yourself, 'How ought I, as a Christian, to act?'"

"It is very true, Ann," said Matilda, sighing heavily; "but it is so hard to be wise and good."

"The thing is," replied Ann, "that we, none of us, refer our thoughts and actions enough to another world. People act as if this was their only life, and forget it is the first short step in endless existence."

The girls were silent, and their old friend went on. "I often think if young people could but know, or enter fully into the feelings that oppress the minds of the aged respecting their past conduct, it would

serve as a warning against many of the faults they commit."

"It would be difficult to reflect as you say, Ann," said Juliet.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Rushton; "the world has many charms, the young think. To me, all now appears worthless, that has not the great end of our being in view—preparing for a better world. How often, as I sit here alone, thinking of days past, I say to myself, if my life was to come over again, how differently I would act."

"I am sure," said Juliet, with warmth, "you must always have been a good woman."

"You mean kindly towards me, my dear," replied Ann, "in so saying; but who is there even among the best of us, that has not much to repent of. I will say nothing now of great sins, but of the little ones that are frequently committed without even a passing thought, and much less with repentant feelings. Many an old person looks back in bitterness of heart, to many words and actions that have pained those they were bound to love, cherish, and respect. The unkind look, the sharp answer, and the careless behaviour, disregarded in youth, return in memory upon the aged with keen and never-ceasing regret."

"You would save us," said Matilda, "from such feelings, if you could, dear Ann."

"I would," said the old woman fervently. But—" she paused a moment, and then continued—"things appear so different to the aged to what they do to the young. I know that I must very shortly meet my God; there is no putting it off, I must meet Him. I must stand before Him, and receive my judgment from Him. Oh! how fervently do I wish that all my days had been passed in His service; all that I did, connected with this world alone, I now feel is worse than lost time. When 'all our days are gone, and we bring our years to an end,' what shall comfort us but the thought of those parts of our lives in which *we have striven* to do our duty."

"But Ann," said Matilda earnestly, "the young as well as the old, may have to appear in an instant before their God."

"Certainly," replied Ann; "the old woman of seventy may survive the child of seven."

"Then," said Matilda, "it is as necessary for the youthful as well as the aged to be prepared."

"That is the reason," said Ann, "that I would urge all my young friends to examine and watch their conduct most carefully."

After a short pause in the conversation, Matilda mentioned that she was going to resume her teaching at Mrs. Stirling's on the following day.

"Perhaps, my dear Miss Matilda, a blessing to yourself may follow in what now seems a task."

"Besides the advantage to my brother, do you mean, Ann?" inquired Matilda.

"Yes, I do;" replied Mrs. Rushton; "you have it in your power to set your pupils, Miss Bower and her sister, a good example. You can let them see that you are patient under provocation, that you return obliging answers for rude words, that you are determined to do your duty, however they may choose to neglect theirs. You may, too, if you watch your opportunity, be able to sow a little good seed by giving a word or two of advice now and then."

"I will bear what you say in mind, dear Ann," said Matilda.

"You know, my dear Miss Lonsdale," said Ann, "that Scripture tell us that our 'works do follow us,' and though we are saved by the merits of Jesus Christ alone, it would be a delightful thought that through any good you did you assisted those young ladies to reach to Heaven; and it might make a part of your own happiness there to hear them tell you that it was through the example you set them, that they first strove to act in conformity to God's will."

This conversation with her old friend occurred again and again to Matilda's mind during several painful trials that she still occasionally had to

encounter from Rhoda and Alice. It unavoidably happened now and then, that the instructress was a short time alone with her pupils, and in that time, brief as it was, Matilda had to hear many unpleasant remarks, and occasionally taunting speeches. But Matilda was on her guard, and the invariable sweetness of temper that she evinced, together with her unwearied patience in teaching, the desire she expressed for their improvement, at last took effect upon Rhoda and Alice, and first appearing ashamed of their late improper behaviour, they began to take pains to profit by the instruction they received, and at last showed signs of marked improvement. Nor was it in their music alone that the Misses Bower showed a change for the better. Their characters, under the care and guidance of their mother, greatly aided by the example of Matilda, underwent a gradual reform; and these girls, once so unpromising, grew up at last to be good and amiable young women.

CHAPTER XIV.

Economy. Prudence in Money-Matters. Deserted Family. Important Letter. Parting with a Servant. Difficulty regarding the Payment of House-Rent. Embarrassing Situation. Thoughts of how to Increase an Income. A Boarder proposed. Self-Commendation. Arrival of an Unwelcome Inmate. Driving a Hard Bargain. Pertinacity. The Weak oppressed.

When Matilda, after the departure of her father, first took possession of the sum of money left by him to supply the wants of the family for a year, she thought the amount so large, that there was no need to practise the economy to which she had long been accustomed; but her friend and counsellor, Mrs. Rushton, was of a very different opinion. Without too much giving way to a certain foreboding which she had, that Mr. Lonsdale might be irregular in his remittances of money, she thought it advisable, that so young a girl as Matilda, should be put upon her guard against careless expenditure. Ann, therefore, advised her young friend in a manner so earnest, that Matilda did not think herself justified in disregarding the advice, first to put aside a few pounds from the sum total, seal them up, and on no account touch them till the expiration of a twelvemonth; and then to divide the remainder into four parts, each part to be for the four quarters of the year. And then again she recommended, that the quarter's allowance should be subdivided into weeks, and that at the beginning of each week, a certain portion of the allowance should be subtracted, and laid by for the purchase of clothing, or in case of any emergency.

Matilda had reason to rejoice that she had followed this prudent advice of Mrs. Rushton's, for the year

expired, and some weeks besides, and the girl heard nothing from her father. As time went on, and no more money arrived, both she and Juliet became very anxious as to what they should be able to do. The money they had in hand could not, by any possible contrivance, be made to hold out longer than to the beginning of winter, and when that was expended what was to become of them all.

Both girls, but especially Matilda, had some very uncomfortable feelings respecting this strange conduct on the part of their father. Juliet often said, it was most cruel in him thus to desert his family, while Matilda feared that some mischance had befallen him. She could not bring herself to think, that it was by voluntary neglect that his children were placed in such trying circumstances.

The girls consulted together how they could make the most of their narrow means, and day after day some little abridgment, not of luxuries,—those had long been dispensed with,—but of comforts, and even of necessaries, was made; still, approaching want stared them in the face, when, to their unspeakable delight, Matilda received a packet containing money, together with a letter from her father.

Great as had been their necessity, and fearful as their prospects appeared, the letter gave the girls more pleasure than the money that accompanied it.

The letter was short, and had apparently given the writer much trouble to indite, but its contents were of first-rate importance. It told of an entire change of heart and mind that Mr. Lonsdale had undergone, and which blessed change had been wrought under a long and severe illness, during which he had been attended by an exemplary clergyman. Mr. Lonsdale expressed in moving terms the sorrow he felt at his past conduct, and an earnest hope that he might yet live to be a blessing and a support to his children. The letter bore no date, and was concluded in haste;

a few lines being added in a postscript, saying that he would write soon again.

The only drawback to the pleasure of this letter was, that no information was afforded by it, as to where the writer was, and what were his plans; and when her first emotions of pleasure had subsided, Matilda felt a fear lest her father might not ultimately recover, for it was only too evident that he was still suffering severely in health, notwithstanding the perfect resignation he evinced to the Divine will, and the repentance expressed for his former rebellious conduct under the chastening hand of the Almighty.

Mrs. Rushton participated in the pleasure of her young friends on their hearing from their father, and though unwilling to cast a damp upon their joy, she still reminded them that the future was uncertain; and again strongly advised the practice of strict economy. Matilda had too fully experienced the benefit arising from her old friend's advice, not to be most willing again to follow it, and she also acted upon Ann's suggestion respecting their servant.

Harriet was too expensive a servant for persons of such limited means as the Lonsdales, and as soon as the young woman could provide herself with a place to her satisfaction, Matilda parted with her, and took as a substitute a little girl, the daughter of the woman who had nursed Mrs. Rushton during a part of her severe illness. The child was quick and handy, and willing to be taught, and Matilda soon found her services in many respects, more efficient and far pleasanter than those of Harriet, who had always been a very indifferent servant. Of course the little girl required a good deal of superintendence, and there were many things in which she needed assistance; but Matilda was very methodical, and she brought up her young sister and brother to wait chiefly on themselves, and to give as little trouble as possible.

Rupert, whose ideas had greatly expanded of late, and who was getting every day more manly, wished to be of use in the family, and before he went to school of a morning, or after his return home, he would chop wood for the fires, or pump water for the service of the house, or he would occasionally do some little repairs about the premises, which saved the expense of hiring a man to do them. All the young party were fond of gardening, and it was surprising how neat and orderly four pair of willing hands kept the small plot of ground which formed the kitchen garden, and the little parterre set apart for the cultivation of flowers. The produce of the young peoples' labour was no little saving either in the expense of housekeeping; for the vegetables spared meat and bread, and the salads supplied the place of butter and cheese.

Mrs. Rushton's fears respecting the uncertainty that might attend Mr. Lonsdale's communications with his family were unhappily verified, for the promised letter never arrived, and Christmas came and passed away, and no tidings were heard of Mr. Lonsdale. By careful management the supply of money sent by him could be made to last till the spring, as far as regarded the support of the family; but where was the money to pay the house rent to come from? The house in which the Lonsdales lived was far larger than they required; but even if Matilda could have made up her mind to take the daring step of parting with it without her father's leave, it would have availed nothing, for Mr. Lonsdale had it on a lease, and above a year of the term was still unexpired.

By agreement the payments were made half-yearly, and the amount of rent for the next half year would be due to the landlord early in the spring. The fear that this money would not be forthcoming often laid heavily on Matilda's mind; but she had a far deeper source of anxiety than that, for she dreaded lest her *father* was again ill, or perhaps even dead. She felt

in her own mind convinced that something extraordinary would alone prevent his writing; and the warmth of affection he expressed towards his children forbid the idea that he would leave them in want, if it was in his power to prevent it. Then again hope would revive in her breast, and she would consider that it might be accidental, Mr. Lonsdale's not writing, nor sending any farther remittances. He had not said where he was; but she conjectured that he was most probably far away in some distant land, where the post or other modes of conveyance might be uncertain and irregular.

The idea of losing her father, now that he was again what he had once been to her, was inexpressibly painful to Matilda; and she indulged in many a day-dream of his returning, perhaps unexpectedly, and of his again dwelling in the bosom of his family in peace and happiness.

But as week followed week and no tidings were heard of the absentee, the positive evils of hers and her sister's and brother's situation pressed heavily upon Matilda's mind. It was not that any urgent want was yet experienced, but it was the future, the gloomy future, that she looked to.

The idea of incurring debts that she could not pay was insufferable to this girl's mind, and she inherited her father's punctuality and exactness in all money transactions, however small. The chief thing that weighed on her mind, regarding the expenses of the family, was the house-rent, which would be due in the spring, and she considered whether it would be possible to save the amount, or a part of it even, out of Mr. Lonsdale's last remittance. With this view, she redoubled her attention to economy; and in this laudable purpose she was aided by Juliet and Rupert, and even by Kate, as far as such a young child could enter into her views.

By Ann's advice, seconded by her own earnest wishes, Matilda determined, if nothing in the mean

time was heard from her father, to speak to the landlord, and tell him how she was circumstanced, and propose giving up the house, in order that he might let it to a more profitable tenant.

Both the girls often, in talking over their prospects with Mrs. Rushton, asked her if she could suggest any mode by which their present expenses might be lessened, and a chance afforded of hoarding up a sum of money to add to the savings in housekeeping, by which the half-year's house-rent might be paid.

One afternoon, Ann, after a long discussion with her young friends on the present state of their affairs, and their future prospects, said,—

"I have been thinking lately, my dears, that if you could get some lady to come and live with you, and pay you for a room to herself, and join with you in housekeeping, it might be an advantage.

"Oh, that is the very thing!" said Juliet; "I wonder we never thought of it before."

"If we could have a pleasant person," said Matilda; "but—" She stopped short, and added, "I have no right to be particular."

"It would not," said Ann, "be half so pleasant, dear Miss Matilda, I am aware, as being by yourselves; but I suggested this plan merely as it is a case of necessity."

"Yes, Ann, I am aware of that," replied Matilda, "and I think we might meet with some one who would be pleasant, or at any rate not disagreeable."

"She would live with us, of course?" said Juliet; "not keep in her own room."

"That," said Ann, "would depend on what arrangements you make; but, as far as I can tell, I do not think you would readily meet with any lady who would like to live secluded. To be with cheerful, pleasant companions, is generally the object of ladies who go to board and lodge in a family."

"*I think*," said Juliet, "that I should like a lady

to come and live with us—at any rate for a time. A little variety is pleasant."

Matilda's feelings were very different on the subject; she was of so thoroughly a domestic turn, that the idea was not at all pleasant to her—that of having a stranger constantly sitting beside her hearth, and mixing in all family matters, preventing all freedom of communication between herself and Juliet and Rupert; and even if she did not personally interfere with the management of affairs, yet thinking herself entitled to dictate and to find fault in right of the sum she paid for her accommodation.

But though such were Matilda's sentiments, she was far too conscientious not to be desirous of doing anything, however unpleasant, that would be the means of enabling her to pay the landlord the sum of money that would, at no very distant period, be due to him. And so accustomed was she to consider others before herself, that she tried to enter into Juliet's views, and to feel glad that their society should be enlarged by the introduction of a stranger.

In consequence of this new scheme, one or two shopkeepers put up a notice in their windows, stating the nature of the accommodation that was offered, but without mentioning the names of the parties concerned. But nothing came of it, for Riverton was a small place, and house-rent was comparatively cheap; and it happened at the time that two or three small houses were to be let, so that there appeared very little chance of assistance to the Lonsdales from this source, and Juliet was beginning entirely to give up the hope of having "an agreeable, obliging, cheerful lady," to enliven the domestic circle, when one day, as she was returning from Broomheath, her old acquaintance, Miss Pringle, came tripping up behind her, and calling her to stop, exclaimed,—

"I am quite fortunate in meeting with you this morning, dear Miss Juliet; you are so sensible; I want a little advice."

"I am afraid," returned Juliet, laughing, "that I am very little capable of advising a lady like yourself; you must be much wiser than I am."

"Oh dear no!" replied Miss Pringle; "I am quite a child in worldly matters."

Juliet looked surprised, and thought to herself that Miss Pringle had a very different reputation among those who knew her.

"You know," said the lady, "that I have been away from Riverton for two or three months." Juliet assented, and the lady continued: "Since my return, I do not find myself comfortable where I am."

"You have apartments at Green's, I think," said Juliet.

"Yes," replied Miss Pringle; "and they do not turn out pleasant people."

"You have been with them a long while," said Juliet.

"The more reason that they should behave well to me," answered Miss Pringle. "I am so obliging, so accommodating, and give no trouble whatever, so that any one might be glad of me as an inmate."

A vague notion floated through Juliet's mind that she had once heard that the Greens complained of Miss Pringle as a troublesome lodger, and had tried in vain to get rid of her; but the idea passed away from her thoughts, especially as Miss Pringle gave such an account of herself.

"Now," continued the lady, "I am on the look-out for a new home. What a charming word is home; is it not, dear Juliet? Since I lost my ever-to-be-lamented aunt, I have never known the delights of a dear domestic circle. I quite pine to be among those I could love, and who would love me; do you know, I would do anything for those who would be affectionate towards me. My heart is beating now at the thought of living in the midst of kind, loving souls, who, in return for any attachment they would show *me*, I would do my utmost to please and serve in any

way in my power. Now, tell me, my young friend, do you know where I could find such a situation as this?"

Juliet did not immediately reply, and her companion went on:—

"If there was music, too, in the family, it would increase the delight. I am passionately fond of music, and do not dislike even to hear practising."

Juliet wondered if Miss Pringle had seen the notice which Matilda had sent to the shops.

"You do not answer me," said Miss Pringle, in dulcet accents. "Cannot you tell me where I could meet with such a home?"

"We want some one to live with us," said Juliet; "but—"

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Miss Pringle. "Will you have me?" and then she ran on as fast as she could speak of the delight she should experience at living with the young Lonsdales, and of all that she would do to please them and make herself beloved, and ended with proposing a half-yearly payment, which was very much within the sum Matilda had named when giving her notice.

Juliet replied that Matilda desired weekly payments.

"Oh, well," said Miss Pringle, "weekly or half-yearly, it is all the same to me, as long as I live with you."

Juliet mentioned the weekly amount her sister intended to ask.

"That is too much, dear Juliet," said Miss Pringle, gently shaking her head, and looking plaintive; "more than I *could* give. I am the least of all possible little eaters, and I give no trouble; indeed, no one would know I was in the house, except—except that I should be so very kind."

"I will speak to my sister," said Juliet.

"Do, there's a love," said Miss Pringle; "and do, do, dear Juliet, persuade her to let me come and live with you. I *love you* all, but you the most."

Miss Pringle then passing her arm through that of her young companion, took two or three turns up and down a meadow with her, talking all the time, as Juliet thought, in a highly amusing manner, of a variety of things she had done and seen during her absence from Riverton; and when the ladies parted, the younger of the two was exceedingly pleased at the possibility of having so entertaining a person to live constantly in her family.

Nothing could be more entirely opposite than the feelings of the two sisters, when Juliet related the conversation that she had been having with Miss Pringle, and expressed the pleasure it would give her to have her for their inmate.

Matilda did not know a great deal of the lady, certainly; but there was a something about her which was the very reverse of attractive; and she considered it an unlucky chance that Miss Pringle, of all people, should be the person to fill the place they wanted, supposing she consented to pay the required price.

The sisters talked the subject over together for some time, each supporting her separate view; but Juliet was so far influenced by Matilda's opinion, that she agreed that unless Miss Pringle consented to their terms, they would decline her offer, and trust that some more eligible person would soon be met with.

Matilda said that she concluded Miss Pringle would call next day, and then she would give her this answer; but the lady, for some reasons of her own, preferred speaking to Juliet by herself, and consequently waited till she met the girl, "quite by accident," when she was out walking, and assuming an indifference she was far from feeling, she inquired what answer Matilda made to her proposal. Juliet answered as had been agreed; and Miss Pringle, making no farther reply than a gentle shrug of the shoulders, in token of unwilling acquiescence, began talking away in her most amusing style to Juliet, telling her a great deal of *gossip*, and exciting the girl's interest to hear more.

Juliet felt slightly mortified that this entertaining lady expressed no regret that she was not to live with those for whom, the day before, she had expressed such great love and esteem; but she was somewhat consoled, on taking leave of Miss Pringle, to receive a pressing invitation to accompany her in a walk the next day, which invitation the young girl most willingly accepted.

Juliet was punctual to the appointed time, and so was Miss Pringle, for they met at the Willow Meadows, the place of rendezvous, just at the same moment. Miss Pringle expressed a great deal of pleasure at seeing her "darling young friend," and exerted herself a great deal for her entertainment during a long walk, from which Juliet returned more pleased than ever with her companion.

Days passed on, and no tidings arrived from Mr. Lonsdale; money was becoming scarcer and scarcer; and no one was found to fill the place Miss Pringle desired to occupy. Matilda was greatly disconcerted, and one morning, after she had been sitting a long while poring over her small expenses, and calculating her still smaller means, she said,—

"It really is very distressing that we can find no one to come and live with us, and lessen our expenses. I hope we never shall be driven into taking Miss Pringle; I had rather suffer any privation than do so; still—"

She was interrupted in what she would have said farther by the little maid coming to ask some question, and Juliet left the room to take Kate out for a walk.

Juliet had not proceeded farther than the middle of the town, when she encountered her now frequent companion in her walks, Miss Pringle. The lady advanced to meet her young friend with a slow step and downcast air; and affectionately pressing Juliet's outstretched hand, she murmured,—

"Good bye, Juliet, good bye; I shall never forget you!"

"Why do you say good bye, Miss Pringle?" inquired Juliet, in a straightforward manner.

"Because," replied Miss Pringle, assuming something of a theatrical manner, "the Fates, or rather your cruel sister Matilda, separates us."

"Are you really then going to leave Riverton?" said Juliet, in a tone implying considerable regret.

"I must," said Miss Pringle, "much as I lament it; for I can find nothing to suit me. I might, certainly, meet with apartments where I could be a solitary inhabitant; but that I could not now bear the thought of. It having once entered my mind, that I could possibly make my home in a charming family, where I should find congeniality of mind and tastes; of thoughts and pursuits; where we should have but one interest, and where our lives would pass in one unvaried round of peace and harmony,—after having once entertained such an idea, think if I could bear the prospect of a lonely life!"

"I am very sorry you are going away," said Juliet.

"Indeed!" said Miss Pringle; "my dear young friend, you delight me."

"I shall miss you very much," said Juliet.

"Then, why," said Miss Pringle, "cannot I come, and be for ever with you?"

"You do not like to give what we, or rather my sister, requires."

"I should not be half the expense any other person would," replied Miss Pringle; "and had my means been large, as large as my heart, dear Juliet, I would most willingly give what is asked, but—"

The lady paused abruptly, and her companion said, "If it depended on me alone, Miss Pringle, I should be very glad to have you come and live with us."

"Dear girl!" exclaimed Miss Pringle, with warmth, "what a kind heart you have, and what a confiding disposition yours is."

Juliet made no reply, for she was revolving in her

mind, first of all, the probability of losing for ever the society of a person who was very agreeable to her; and next, that if this lady really left Riverton, the chances were very much against her and her sister finding any one else to come and live with them, and lessen their expenses, which every day seemed more burdensome. On the other hand she knew that it would be nothing but the direst necessity that would make her sister receive Miss Pringle into their house.

Miss Pringle partly divined what was passing in Juliet's mind, and being determined, if possible, to carry her point, and make good her entrance into the home of the young Lonsdales, said,—

"Good bye, dearest Juliet; I must go and seek another home. I do not think you will readily find any one to come and live with you; at any rate, no one who would have been what I should have been to you. Good by, I *must* go now."

Still the lady did not move away; and Juliet, who did not possess much penetration of character, and was, moreover, a little open to flattery, thought that Miss Pringle still lingered for the pleasure of being near her.

"When do you go?" said she.

"Immediately," was the reply; "I am on my way now to the station."

"To-day!" said Juliet, startled at the announcement of so sudden a departure.

"Yes, to-day; and it is most inconvenient to me to do so. I would give any thing to remain one fortnight—a single fortnight—longer, to arrange some important affairs; but I have parted with my apartments, and I must go."

"A fortnight," repeated Juliet. "Did you say you want to remain that time longer at Riverton?"

"I do," replied Miss Pringle; "and it just strikes me, that I could come to your house for just that time, and then you could drive me away."

"I certainly think you might do that," said Juliet, who considered that the lady was quite serious in her determination to leave Riverton.

"It is decided, then. Thank you a thousand times, dear Juliet, for the permission. I remember something I must do immediately."

"I only say, I think," said Juliet; but before she could add another word, the lively lady, kissing her hand, and calling out, "*Au revoir*," had darted across to the other side of the street, and entered a shop.

Juliet stood a minute or two quite perplexed. Did Miss Pringle, she considered, really mean to come without further arrangements being made, and if so, what would Matilda think of her having given the lady permission to become an inmate of their house, though only for a fortnight, without consulting her. Juliet certainly was very much pleased at the prospect of a lively, pleasant fortnight with her friend, still she felt she ought first to have consulted her sister on the subject. She debated the matter in her mind, and at one time she thought she would follow Miss Pringle into the shop, and ascertain more fully her intentions; and then she reflected, that the money for a fortnight would be a very desirable thing. She was still standing irresolute what to do, when Miss Pringle reappeared.

Had Juliet been a little more at leisure to observe, she would have perceived that a second encounter was not at all what Miss Pringle wished, especially when Juliet hastening after her, said—

"I must consult Matilda first about your coming."

"What, when it is only for a fortnight?" said Miss Pringle reproachfully. "Besides, you said I should come, and you cannot go from your word, dearest Juliet. And do you know," continued the lady, assuming a very lively air, "that I have a great deal to tell you. I now know the sequel to the strange event I told you of the last day we walked to the common. Are you not anxious to hear it?"

"I should like to hear it exceedingly," said Juliet; and with her characteristic thoughtlessness, she forgot everything but her present amusement, and begged to be told the interesting particulars on the spot.

But Miss Pringle declined gratifying the young girl's curiosity then, saying—

"Not now, dearest; I will tell you in the evening, when we are sitting together in *our* happy home." Then, seeing that Juliet was about to speak, she continued: "It would be positively inhospitable, unneighbourly, and even rude, to tell me now I must not come, especially as the time is so short that I should be with you." Then, briefly adding, "you will see me soon," Miss Pringle turned sharp round a corner, which led to the back entrance of the Greens' house, and was out of sight in a moment.

It must be confessed that Juliet was by no means displeased at what now was inevitable; and forgetful of all Matilda's objections, she hastened home to impart the news of Miss Pringle's proposed speedy arrival.

When Matilda learnt what was about to take place, she felt quite dismayed. She had always entertained, without positively knowing why, a strong objection to admit Miss Pringle into the family, and it so happened that during the short period of Juliet's absence, she had seen and spoken to a servant of Mrs. Green's, the person at whose house Miss Pringle had apartments. Accidentally mentioning her mistress's lodger, the servant said that Miss Pringle was "the most troublesome, meddlesome, and stingy person that ever lived; and that Mrs. Green would get rid of her directly only she owed her money."

When Juliet first announced the fact of Miss Pringle's coming, Matilda could hardly credit what her sister said, and exclaimed—

"You surely do not mean to say that you have agreed to let Miss Pringle come and take up her abode *with us?*"

"It is only for a fortnight," said Juliet in a deprecating tone. "I could not be so unkind as to refuse; besides, we should have lost her altogether if I had not consented; and you know how we want money, and there seems no chance of our getting anyone else. I will tell you again how it all came about;" and she repeated more fully what had passed between herself and the lady in question; and then Matilda, in her turn, communicated the information she had gathered from Mrs. Green's servant.

Juliet for a moment seemed startled; but quickly recovering herself, she said—

"It is only a servant's gossip; and you would not, dear Matilda, attach importance to that, I should think?"

"And then," said Matilda, Juliet's observation not making much impression on her, "Miss Pringle is so troublesome and meddling, and, I dare say, will want a far better table than we can afford to keep, and—"

"Oh, no!" said Juliet; "for according to your own authority, Miss Pringle is stingy, and will, of course, be saving."

Matilda, vexed as she was, could not help smiling at the simplicity implied in this observation of her sister's.

"My dear Juliet," said she; "Miss Pringle may be very economical as far as regards her own expenditure, but it is a very different thing living at the expense of other people. What is she to pay us?"

"I do not know," replied Juliet hesitatingly.

"What, did you not settle the terms before you consented that she should come?" exclaimed Matilda.

"It is only for a fortnight," repeated Juliet.

"I am not at all sure of that," said Matilda; "I had better hasten off directly, and see Miss Pringle; I *will go this* minute."

"You will not stop her coming?" said Juliet.

"My dear sister," replied Matilda, "you know how desirous I am at all times of doing what you like; but in this instance, I am certain I had better act contrary to your wishes. I know we should repent taking Miss Pringle into our house;" so saying, she hurried away, and throwing on her mantle and bonnet, she lost no time in arriving at Mrs. Green's. Matilda sent in her name, requesting to speak to Miss Pringle immediately; but word was brought her that the lady was so particularly engaged, she could not see any one.

This was vexatious; but thinking that she should be sure to obtain an interview a little later in the day, she left word that she would call again, and went to do two or three little errands in the town. After she had made her own purchases, she remembered some little article that Juliet was in need of, but not knowing the quantity, she determined to go home and ask her sister how much she wanted, and procure it for her before she paid her second visit to Miss Pringle.

On leaving the shop, Matilda encountered Mrs. Stirling, who said she was on her way to her young friend's house, to request her to change a day for the music lessons; and when that arrangement was made, Mrs. Stirling asked Matilda to go with her to a shop where she wanted to order some articles of stationery. Matilda consented; and when there, a little delay occurred in looking at a book that was just come down from London and in Mrs. Stirling's ordering another, so that by the time Matilda returned to speak to Juliet, it might, perhaps, have been a full hour from the time of her setting off to Green's.

On opening the house-door, what was the poor girl's consternation at beholding the passage crammed with boxes, small and great, all bearing the unharmonious name of "Miss Priscilla Pringle."

Certain that the owner of these treasures would

quickly follow, Matilda, as a last hope, sought Juliet, to consult with her on the possibility of still stopping the dreaded arrival. But it was all too late; for on entering the parlour, there sat Miss Pringle, her bonnet and shawl deposited on the table, and she chatting away to Juliet in as composed a manner as if she had been dwelling months in the family.

On Matilda's entrance, the lady rose, and advanced, with both hands extended, to meet her, and clasping Matilda's unwilling hand in hers, she said in her most gracious manner—

"I am come, dear Miss Lonsdale, to seek a home under your friendly roof; your darling sister assured me I should be welcome."

"My sister," replied Matilda, firmly, but not ungently, "said you wished to stop a fortnight longer at Riverton, and for that space of time you can remain here if you wish; but give me leave to say I expect the full amount that it has always been my intention to demand."

"We will talk of that afterwards, my dear Miss Lonsdale," said the lady; "do not let us interrupt these happy moments of my first introduction to your charming family, by dull money matters—you will be sure to be satisfied."

But Matilda was not to be thus put off; she firmly stood her ground, and without any rudeness, insisted upon an agreement as to terms being made on the spot. Miss Pringle tried hard to evade coming to a settlement, and finally pleaded so earnestly to have the weekly payment what she had originally told Juliet she could only afford to give, that Matilda at last consented to take the sum she proffered.

This matter being at last arranged, Miss Pringle expressed a wish to be shown to her room, and to have her luggage conveyed there.

"This," said Matilda, opening the door of what went by the name of the south room, "is the apart-

ment we intend appropriating to the use of any new inmate we may have."

"Oh, anywhere!" exclaimed Miss Pringle, glancing round the commodious and comfortable-looking apartment; "put me anywhere you like—if with you all, I must be happy."

"But how are we to get your boxes upstairs?" inquired Matilda; "we have only the little girl you saw just now as servant."

"Good little soul!" exclaimed Miss Pringle affectedly; and then turning to make some trifling changes in the apartment, she made no reply to Matilda's question.

"Have you any one coming to move them?" repeated Matilda; "I know of no one who can do so; we were not prepared for your coming."

"I would not put you to inconvenience for the world," returned the lady, still evading the question.

"I think," said Matilda, "I hear the baker's-man below; perhaps he would convey your boxes upstairs for a trifle. I will run and see; it is lucky his arriving just now."

The baker's-man was applied to, and executed his task; and when he had accomplished it, Matilda asked the obliged party to give him something for his trouble.

"I fear, my good man," said the lady, "I have no change; oblige me, my dear Miss Lonsdale, by giving him a trifle."

"I have no change either," said Matilda, in a tone that seemed rather unaccommodating, for she saw through Miss Pringle's manœuvre to get rid of paying a few pence.

"I must give you something another time," said Miss Pringle, turning away.

"It had better be now," said Matilda; "the man can give, or get you change."

"No, not that," said Miss Pringle; "I will try

and find something; it is really very inconvenient just now, and I do not know where my little basket is, and I am so hurried, and—"

"Here it is," said Matilda, handing up a small basket to the lady, who searched in it, and then in her pocket, and then again in her basket, and though Matilda espied some small silver coins lying at the bottom of the latter, Miss Pringle declared she could find nothing, till at last she again thrust her hand into her pocket and drew something from it, which she put in the man's hand. Matilda thought it looked very like a halfpenny; whatever it might be, the man laid it on the top of his thumb, spun it contemptuously into the air, and walked off down stairs, whistling as he went.

Miss Pringle having fairly established herself in the house, Matilda wisely resolved to let the event disturb her as little as possible, and she also determined to behave in such a way towards the intruder that she should have no cause for after-repentance. Acting upon these good resolutions, Matilda was as polite and obliging to Miss Pringle as if she had been a welcome guest. Miss Pringle, in her turn, also appeared desirous to please, and took pains to talk in an agreeable and amusing manner; she also seemed perfectly contented in her situation, and expressed herself entirely satisfied with all that was done for her. At the end of the week, too, she cheerfully paid her money; and by the time the fortnight had nearly expired, Matilda began to think that she had perhaps entertained an unjust prejudice against her inmate, and reflected that after all, what she had heard to Miss Pringle's disadvantage, might be nothing but idle gossip. At the same time this young girl, to whom circumstances had imparted a wisdom beyond her years, was not put off her guard, and her objections to the lady, though much subdued, were still remembered.

Juliet was more than satisfied with their inmate,

and felicitated both herself and Matilda upon the increase of their means which she had brought about. On the morning of the day preceding that on which Miss Pringle was to take her departure, as she was sitting at breakfast with the young Lonsdales, and expressing the lively regret she should feel at parting from them, a letter was delivered to her, which she no sooner perused than she exclaimed—

"How unfortunate! how distressing! the family I was going to reside with, owing to unexpected circumstances, cannot receive me for a week or two! What shall I do?"

"Stop here, by all means," said Juliet quickly—well pleased at this unexpected delay—"I am sure we shall be very glad to have you with us longer."

"And I shall be most happy to remain," said Miss Pringle, "though it is very unpleasant when one's arrangements are made, to be disappointed."

Matilda was far from participating in her sister's pleasure at the prospect of having Miss Pringle's company still longer; and as regarded pecuniary matters, she felt very doubtful if any benefit would arise from her protracted stay. Thinking thus, she deemed it prudent to ascertain a little more definitely what Miss Pringle's intentions were; and accordingly, the next day, when the lady paid her weekly account, Matilda inquired when it was probable she would take her departure.

"I really cannot tell you to a day, Miss Lonsdale," replied Miss Pringle to Matilda's inquiry; "but I am to have another letter very soon."

"And in the mean time," said Matilda, "you will no doubt pay the weekly sum for your board and lodging that I originally required."

"You little miser!" exclaimed Miss Pringle; "what would you have? surely I pay you far more than enough."

The epithet so unceremoniously bestowed on Matilda could not well have been more inappropriately applied, for she was of a generous nature,

and at this very time was making sacrifices of her own comforts to increase those of the stranger in the family.

Matilda felt annoyed; but conquering her feelings, she simply said,—

"I do not deserve that name, Miss Pringle; and the terms I ask you are perfectly fair,—lower, I believe, than you will meet with in almost any other situation, considering what you have in return."

"Oh! do not take what I said seriously," cried Miss Pringle, who was anxious to conciliate Matilda, at the same time that she resolved some how or other to have her own terms as long as she remained with the Lonsdales; and so pertinacious was she on this point, that poor Matilda had no alternative but to submit.

Several weeks passed, and no letter arrived for Miss Pringle; at least none, it appeared, relative to her departure. Matilda often held a consultation with her sister on the subject, and expressed a wish that they could know something decided as to the intention of their boarder.

Matilda said it was very strange that Miss Pringle should hear nothing from the parties with whom she had fixed to reside; and also, that she was very much inclined to think that Miss Pringle never had any intention of going to them, or that the whole history was a fabrication. Juliet warmly defended the lady from such imputations, and said she and her sister could not tell what might have arisen to cause a delay in the arrival of the expected letter.

Matilda would often say that she should like to be openly and fairly dealt with; and Juliet, in reply, would remind her sister, that all the time Miss Pringle staid she was paying money; and that though the gain was not much, still it *was* something in addition to their scanty means.

Matilda would then say that it was not at all right in their boarder to make terms for herself, and *that if* Miss Pringle did not very shortly speak on

the subject of her departure herself, she would tell her that if she remained with them she must pay the stipend they in the first instance demanded.

Matilda was the more resolute to do this; for as time went on, her boarder gradually became more expensive, and made demands which at first she had not thought of doing; so that when the young housekeeper made her calculations at the end of the week, she found her gains amount to almost nothing, while her increase of trouble and anxiety was very great.

There was, too, something of a change in the lady's manner; she was not so gracious, and she showed an inclination to find fault. The dinner-hour was sometimes inconvenient, the children were noisy, and the little maid stupid or uncivil. At last Matilda determined to ascertain if Miss Pringle was going to the family she had spoken of; and if not, to tell her plainly that if it did not suit her to pay the sum she required, she must request her to take her departure.

But Matilda had very much over-rated her powers of negotiation, in thinking that she should be able to make Miss Pringle explicit as to her intentions and future movements.

This lady was expert in parrying a question, and an adept in giving the turn she wished to a conversation, and though Matilda was persevering in her straightforward request to be enlightened as to her boarder's views, her demand to be paid the full amount of the sum she had asked, she was obliged for the present to rest contented under the assurance that Miss Pringle expected soon to hear from the parties with whom she was going to take up her residence, and that no alteration in the payment for board and lodging would be made.

"It is not worth while, my dear Miss Lonsdale," repeated Miss Pringle again and again, "to make any change for the short time I am to remain with you."

Matilda felt herself completely baffled, and endeavoured to draw what consolation she best could from patience under present disagreeables, and the hope that a change for the better would soon occur.

CHAPTER XV.

Honourable Proposal. Frivolous Conversation. Miss Pringle. Firmness. Obstinacy. False Estimate of Character. Fault Finding. Proposed Changes in Family Arrangements. Irregular Payments. Troublesome Interference. Domestic Disturbances. Unpleasant Surmises. Increase of Annoyances. Ideal Happiness. Consolation in Retirement. Children's Troubles. Complaints. An Enemy to Peace and Harmony. Promises.

When the time for paying the rent of the house arrived, Matilda still hearing nothing from her papa, nor receiving any farther remittances from him, sent for the landlord, as she had previously determined to do; and after stating, that owing to Mr. Lonsdale's absence, she was wholly unable to pay more than a very small part of the sum due, offered to give the house up; being, as she said, unwilling to continue in it with so very remote a chance of the rent being paid. Much to her surprise, the landlord refused her offer, and desired that she would remain in it till the end of the term, which would expire at the termination of another year. The landlord said that in the mean time Mr. Lonsdale might return; and if not, there were sufficient effects to pay him what was due. Matilda perceived that there was good policy in this, for Riverton was so small and retired a place, that the chances of letting a house were quite as much against as for.

One immediate demand for money was thus removed; but the thought of the furniture, or any part of it, being sold without the sanction of her father, was so utterly at variance with all Matilda's feelings of affection and duty, that she determined to make every exertion in her power to prevent such an

ward circumstance taking place. One great step towards it, would have been the having a boarder, who was willing and able to make a fair remuneration for the accommodation afforded. Miss Pringle decidedly did not do this; and she was occupying the place that another might have filled with advantage; at the same time no other presented herself, although Matilda still kept the notices up at the shops where they were first sent.

Juliet often said that their present boarder was better than none, but Matilda began seriously to question this in a pecuniary way; and, in reply to her sister's observation—that at any rate it was a great pleasure to have Miss Pringle's company, and that her conversation was very amusing—she said that for herself the society of the lady afforded her no gratification, and that her conversation was of the most common-place description, and confined almost entirely to tittle-tattle and sarcastic remarks upon people. Matilda feared that the associating with Miss Pringle had a deteriorating effect on her sister's mind, and heartily wished her away, even if there had been no other reason.

But the wish of getting rid of this lady was very little likely to be gratified, for she had made good her entrance into the Lonsdale family, and there it was her fixed determination to stay, at any rate for a long while to come. She was a needy, selfish, cold-hearted, and calculating person. For some years previous to the opening of this tale, she had been in close attendance upon a sick relation, whose little property she hoped to inherit. In this hope she was not altogether disappointed, for her aunt left her a small annual sum, just sufficient for her to live upon, provided strict attention to economy was paid.

Miss Pringle and her aunt had lived about a mile from Riverton, and at the death of the latter, the former took a small lodging in the town. At the *time the* Lonsdales first decided upon receiving a

lady into their house, in the hope of increasing their means, Miss Pringle was away in search of some advantageous situation to live in, and returning without succeeding in her errand, she was well pleased to learn the intention of the girls. She had often thought how pleasant it would be for her to have a home in their house, but not knowing anything about Mr. Lonsdale's movements, she could say nothing about it.

At the time Miss Pringle met Juliet in her walk, and asked her advice respecting a residence, she was perfectly well acquainted with the intentions of the girls, and the terms on which their accommodation was offered; but Miss Pringle had settled in her own mind that she would not pay the required sum, at the same time that she resolved to take up her abode with the Lonsdales. Thus determined, she watched for an opportunity of speaking to Juliet, whom she considered far more easy of persuasion than her sister, and whom she thought accessible to a little flattery, which could be judiciously thrown in during any discussion that might take place. Miss Pringle—who had arrived at the steady age of thirty-seven—considered that she should have little difficulty in managing two girls so young as the Lonsdales; and having once made good her entrance into the family, she concluded that she should be able to arrange matters very much as she liked.

In Matilda the lady encountered more firmness of character than she expected, and she found herself under the necessity of going more artfully to work in order to maintain her ground, than if she had been treating merely with Juliet. Under much mildness of manner Miss Pringle discovered a resolution of purpose that she did not suppose so youthful a person could maintain, and she exerted herself to appear amiable, and to place herself in as pleasing a light as she could before her juvenile hostess, in order that she might the better work upon her to obtain her own views.

But Miss Pringle was a very determined character in her way also, and she considered that it would be very strange, if, being so much older and so much more experienced in the ways of the world, she did not get the better, to use a favourite expression of her own, of Matilda, and be able, besides paying her own terms, to make several changes that would render matters more convenient and agreeable to her than they were at present.

As to Juliet, Miss Pringle anticipated neither trouble nor opposition from her, for she considered that she had nothing to do but to tell the gay giddy girl some amusing tale, or to relate some piece of exciting gossip, to put her in good humour towards herself immediately. Perhaps Miss Pringle had not made an exact estimate of the younger sister's character any more than she had that of the elder. At present, certainly, Juliet appeared to enjoy the society of their boarder, and seemed always desirous to give her satisfaction and pleasure.

One morning, when the party were sitting at breakfast, Miss Pringle mentioned the meat on which the party had dined the day before, and complained that it was not very good. Matilda replied that she did not think it was so good as usual, and that she would speak about it. Miss Pringle said that in such matters it was always best to judge for one's self, and that it did not do to trust to the tradesman.

"You cannot have good meat," said the lady, "unless you choose it yourself. Now, my dear Miss Lonsdale, it strikes me that it would be an excellent thing if you were to let me keep house: it would be a mutual benefit. I, with my experience gained while living with my poor aunt, must be a much fitter person for the office than you; and you would, if I take the labour off your hands, be able to attend much more to your studies and accomplishments."

"I am much obliged to you," replied Matilda, "but I prefer attending to all the concerns of house-

keeping myself; and as regards the meat just spoken of, I think its not being very good, was accidental. We have dealt with Mr. Lamb ever since we have lived at Riverton, and he has hardly ever given us cause for complaint."

"I should prefer dealing with Legg," said Miss Pringle; "my aunt always did; and I shall, with your leave, take the liberty of now and then ordering a joint from him. And now we are on the subject of dinner, do you not think we may have a little more variety? A little dainty now and then would tempt a delicate appetite like mine."

"You have a very good appetite, I think," said Rupert, who had more than once been rather astonished at the quantity of food Miss Pringle frequently consumed.

The lady did not condescend to notice the "rough schoolboy," but returned to the subject she first started, and pressed earnestly to be allowed to take upon herself the office of housekeeper, which was again politely, but positively, refused by Matilda.

Nor was this by any means the only change this "meddlesome lady" tried to make in the family into which she had forced herself. She made several attempts to sit at the head of the table and carve; and one day, when Matilda was accidentally detained a minute or two away after the dinner was placed on the table, she seated herself in the young mistress's place, and began helping herself and the rest of the party; nor, when Matilda appeared, did she offer to resign her seat, but, on the contrary, said that for the future she would keep that place, and take the trouble of carving off Matilda's hands.

This arrangement was by no means agreeable to any of the young Lonsdales, and they all, even Juliet, protested that Matilda alone should sit at the head of the table, adding that she had been long accustomed to carve, and did it well. Another attempt Miss Pringle made to change the usual habits of

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family was, to make tea instead of Juliet; and when she usurped this office, she put in so large a quantity of tea, that Matilda, in order quietly to put a stop to such extravagance, gave out every evening a certain portion into one of the cups. Miss Pringle being thus thwarted in her plan of making tea "fit to drink," soon ceased to express any desire to undertake the trouble of tea-making.

In many other things it was evident the boarder wished to have the upper hand in the family. She would frequently change the dinner-hour, would go into the kitchen and give troublesome orders, and often detain the little servant so long in her room waiting on her, as very much to interfere with the girl's time for doing her work. Miss Pringle, too, had little or no consideration, as regarded economy; she was extravagant in coals and candles, frequently keeping a light burning great part of the night; and whenever the parlour-fire wanted replenishing, she would start up and put on two or three times as many coals as were required.

Added to all these minor grievances, the boarder began to be irregular in her payments, and when remonstrated with, she would say that she would pay next week; but when the next week arrived, it often happened that a shilling or two were wanted to make up the requisite sum, and on Matilda's pressing most earnestly for the full amount of her money, Miss Pringle would say either that she had been disappointed of remittances, or that she expected them very soon, and would then pay all she owed.

In the mean time Miss Pringle continued to throw out hints as to the table not being so well supplied as it ought, and lamented the want of various dainties that it was wholly out of Matilda's power to procure. Among other things, the unreasonable lady wanted poultry much more frequently than she would have been entitled to have it, even if she had paid the sum first required of her.

Miss Pringle did not forget her proposal of ordering

a joint now and then from Mr. Legg, and from time to time she would send in from the poulterer's a couple of fowls, a turkey, or a pair of ducks; and payment for these articles was always subtracted from the lady's weekly account. Matilda did not like this arrangement, but Miss Pringle protested that it was the same thing if she paid for the provisions of the family, as if she gave the money to her young hostess. Disagreeable as this interference in her domestic arrangements was, Matilda would have been thankful if it had been the only one; but Miss Pringle became more and more troublesome, and her manners were now very far from agreeable, and she was often imperious and overbearing. She was even occasionally quarrelsome with Juliet, and as to the two younger children, she scolded and ordered them about in a way that made them very unhappy.

Poor Matilda's peace was destroyed; her home, the scene of her best enjoyment, was now in a continual state of embroilment; and sharp words and tears had taken the place of the peace and harmony which was her delight, and which had been her solace when suffering from many external troubles.

When the treaty respecting Miss Pringle's being an inmate of the Lonsdale family was pending between herself and Juliet, the lady had professed so great a love for music, that practising, even, did not disturb her; but now the case was very different; and after throwing out a great many hints as to the time the young party wasted in music, she fairly said "the incessant noise of the pianoforte was a positive nuisance."

Matilda was far from regretting this outbreak of her boarder, and availed herself of it, as she had done many times before, to press her to take her departure. But this was the last thing Miss Pringle intended to do; and in making these complaints, she had another object in view, which she hoped to achieve, which was no other than to change her apartment.

In *going* up and down stairs, she had obtained

occasional peeps into a room, the door of which was generally kept locked. This room was Mr. Lonsdale's, and Matilda had a melancholy pleasure in retaining it exactly in the order in which her father had left it. His writing-desk and some favourite books lay on the centre table, just as he had left them the night of his departure; his flute and some music were deposited on a shelf, together with more books and some bundles of MSS. recently tied up. A picture of her mamma stood on a music-stand at the bottom of the bed, and a favourite vase of hers, filled with everlasting flowers, was placed by him on the mantel-piece. Several other articles valued by the owner, were disposed of about different parts of the room, together with a few choice prints and maps of foreign countries.

Matilda never abandoned the hope of her father's return, and every week, assisted by the servant, she removed the dust from the furniture, and opened the windows to air the room. The tender-hearted girl never allowed any one to go into this sanctuary without she was by to keep guard, and on coming out, she carefully locked the door and deposited the key in a safe place.

Now it happened that Miss Pringle had taken a great fancy to this room, for besides having a more cheerful look-out, and being larger, it was fitted up with several shelves, and contained a large wardrobe,—a piece of furniture which her own apartment did not possess. But bent as Miss Pringle ever was on the gratification of all her wishes, and ingenious as she was in devising means to obtain what she desired, she was wholly at a loss how to establish herself and boxes in Mr. Lonsdale's room. She had not hesitated to tell Matilda frequently, that she wished to change her apartment for that lately occupied by Mr. Lonsdale, and that, if she did so, she should be removed from the nuisance of hearing the pianoforte in the *parlour, over* which her room was situated.

To this request, however importunately repeated, it is hardly necessary to say Matilda gave the most decided negative; at the same time she politely added, that the house was so substantially built, that sounds in one room penetrated but little into another. Miss Pringle affected to treat the sentiment that made Matilda hold her father's room sacred, as quite ridiculous; and told Juliet, one day, with the intention that it should be repeated, that she felt assured, indeed she had good reasons for saying so, that Mr. Lonsdale had gone off to a distant country, had married a second wife, and never intended to return to the children he had left behind, and for whom it was very evident he did not care.

The effect of this speech on Matilda was very painful; it excited feelings in her which were at variance with all her cherished hopes of meeting her father again, and living with him in the delightful state of love and harmony in which they had dwelt during the lifetime of her mamma. The unhappy girl would have thought it impossible that there could be any truth in what Miss Pringle said, if that lady had not added that she had good reasons for the assertions she made.

Juliet strove to comfort her sister, and said she was sure that what Miss Pringle said was "an invention merely to gain her point of occupying the room she wished for."

In this instance Juliet evinced more penetration than her sister; for Miss Pringle had not the slightest grounds for what she had asserted respecting Mr. Lonsdale, of whose movements and present residence she was as ignorant as every one else. But Matilda had so many painful subjects weighing on her mind, that she was sooner depressed in spirits, and her feelings more easily worked upon, than formerly, and in a case where she was so deeply interested, her judgment was somewhat obscured.

Her causes *of* annoyance were continually multiply-

ing; and her chief comfort now consisted in short periods of retirement to her own room, where she could weep unseen, and there read and meditate, and implore for assistance from above to bear her trials with Christian patience. Here, too, in the solitude of her room, she would now and then indulge in a little ideal happiness concerning her father. She would fancy him returned to his home, and that he was sitting with his arm thrown around her, recounting all his adventures, and everything that he had seen new and wonderful; and then she would imagine herself walking with him in the moonlight; and after his talking to her of her mamma in heaven, he would tell her of his change of heart, and how his mind was opened to a new view of sacred things; and then, that she should learn who had attended him and nursed him through his illness; and she should hear more about the good clergyman, who had afforded him so much spiritual consolation, and had brought about the blessed change which she delighted to think had been wrought in her father. Then again she would think what a weight of responsibility she should be relieved from, if he were to come, and once again take his place at the head of his family; then she should have some superior in knowledge and wisdom to love and venerate, and to whom she could look up to for guidance and support.

Matilda was of a gentle and loving nature, prompt to forgive and forget injuries; and she never thought of her father but as he had acted towards her in one or two of his last interviews, or as he had been to her in the days of her early childhood, when she was the cherished object of his tenderest love.

But these dreams of bliss and moments of quiet and retirement were generally very short-lived. Hardly would she sometimes be seated in her room, than Rupert, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes, would rush in to tell her of some indignity he had suffered *from Miss* Pringle—how she had interrupted him in

his studies with impertinent remarks, or how she had called him rude and unmannerly; or Kate, with streaming eyes, would seek the protection of her gentle sister, on being turned out of the room for being troublesome or noisy. Perhaps the interruption would arise from the boarder herself, who would abruptly enter Matilda's room with some complaints of the children's behaviour, or of the stupidity and insolence of the little maid; or more frequently to lament the want of some accommodation or other, which she knew full well it was not in the power of her young hostess to bestow. The servant girl, too, in her turn, would often run upstairs to say that she would be glad if Matilda would come down into the kitchen, for that Miss Pringle was interfering with her so, that she could not do her work; or sometimes it would be that the lady scolded the maid, so that the child declared that she would not stop; and more than once Matilda had to pacify the angry feelings of the mother, who declared "that her daughter should not stop to be beaten about by no one," Miss Pringle having, in the excitement of her refined feelings, so far forgotten her *gentlewomanly* character as to bestow some very hearty boxes of the ear on the little servant. And even should no intruder invade the retirement of the mistress of this unquiet household, her ears were frequently assailed by sounds from without, which were foes to peace and tranquillity. Miss Pringle's shrill voice might often be heard in sharp contest with some angry laundress or petty shopkeeper, whom she had defrauded of a part of their just dues, or whom she would not pay at all. Now and then she was in fierce contest with Rupert, who could not endure her, and who was at no pains to conceal his dislike; or she was teasing Kate till she made her cry.

But of all the sounds which indirectly reached Matilda's ears, perhaps there were none so painful to her as the occasional chattering and laughing and whispering she heard going on between Juliet and Miss

Pringle, as they mounted the stairs together to prepare for a walk in the company of each other.

Matilda could not understand her sister's feelings towards their boarder, for when she and Juliet talked together about Miss Pringle's disagreeable behaviour, Juliet would agree perfectly that it was very objectionable, and she would often lament that the lady's payments were irregular.

"Thinking of her as you do," said Matilda one day to her sister, "it surprises me that you should take the pleasure, which it is evident you do, in her company. For myself, I could not be happy to be intimately associated with a person whose conduct compels me to dislike and despise her."

"Oh! she amuses me," said Juliet, carelessly; "and when I am laughing and talking with her, I forget all that is wrong about her."

"Are you wise to do so?" said Matilda, gravely. "Is there not some risk that, by constant and familiar intercourse with objectionable characters, we shall get so accustomed to disregard their faults, that we shall lose our own nice perceptions of right and wrong?"

Juliet made no reply, but she looked very grave, and was silent for some minutes.

"I should be sorry, my dear sister," said Matilda, "to rob you of any enjoyment; but would it not be well to be a little on your guard when alone with Miss Pringle? You will not, I trust, mind my saying this, for you told me some time ago to caution you if I ever again saw you becoming intimate with—" She hesitated, and Juliet quickly added,—

"With an unworthy character like Miss Moore. Yes, I remember I did so; but it is so long ago since all that fuss was made about Miss Bell, that I had almost forgotten all about it."

"Juliet!" said Matilda, in a tone of reproach, "you surely do not mean what you say."

"No, no; I do not," said Juliet, quickly, while a *crimson* blush dyed her cheeks; "I was wrong to say

so; but I did not at the moment wish to talk of grave subjects. I am sure I do not forget that painful business, for it was only last Sunday that I had been thinking it over, and reflecting how much to blame I had been. But—but," added she, in a lively tone, "Miss Pringle is a woman grown, and—"

"The less dangerous companion on that account, do you imagine?" inquired Matilda, archly.

"I thought so," said Juliet. "I surely should not be so likely to be led away by her example as I should by that of a girl of my own age."

"On the contrary, I should fear you would be more so," said Matilda.

"Do you really think so?" said Juliet, who grew serious as she talked. "At any rate, I am quick-sighted enough to some of the good lady's faults, and I wish she would pay better."

"I wish," said Matilda, energetically, "we could get rid of her."

"I am of opinion," said Juliet, "that we shall very soon be properly paid, for lately Miss Pringle has talked a great deal to me of a large sum of money—quite a little fortune she calls it—that is soon coming to her."

"Do you mean," said Matilda, "some money she once told me about, that she expects to have when a law-suit is settled?"

Juliet nodded her head in token of assent, and her sister continued,—

"I am doubtful if there is a law-suit at all, or at any rate one from which she is likely to derive benefit."

"I think you judge her too hardly," said Juliet; "and do you know, dear, that I am certain Miss Pringle is not without her good qualities, for she has a brother just returned to England, to whom she is most devotedly attached."

Matilda smiled, and uttering a hope that this beloved brother would not come to visit his amiable sister, the conversation dropped.

on, half so much if we can but starve her out, and there is no doubt we shall, for she will not stay, I know, when there is not enough to eat, and that of the best, for her greedy self."

The girls laughed at this speech of their brother's, notwithstanding the grave subject they were discussing, and the boy asked Matilda why she did not *make* Miss Pringle go.

"I have requested her to do so, over and over again," replied Matilda.

"I do not think it would be wise," said Juliet, "to send her away now, even if we could, just at the moment when she is in daily expectation of coming into her fortune."

"I wish I could be well assured," said Matilda, "that Miss Pringle has really money to receive; she certainly talks a great deal about present embarrassment in her money-matters."

"I do not think," cried Rupert, "she is so badly off as she says she is. Why, she paid the Greens for her lodging as much, or more than you, Matilda, receive from her, for her keep; and when she was there, she had to find her sweet self in all she ate and drank."

"She says she has had losses, and been at great expenses lately," said Juliet, somewhat espousing Miss Pringle's cause.

"I do not believe a word of her losses and expenses," exclaimed Rupert; "it is all a made-up history to spare her own money; stingy creature as she is!"

"Stingy or not," said Juliet, "my advice is, that we all let our boarder remain here quietly for the present; if we do not, we may lose all chance of our money that is due."

"There can be no harm," said Matilda, "in waiting a little longer, as we have already gone so far; but I have great fears—"

"I am certain you have no cause for fear," said Juliet, interrupting her sister.

"Well, we shall see," said Matilda, not wishing to press her opinion further at that time, perceiving that opposition would be painful to Juliet. "Now let us try our utmost, to think of what we can possibly do to procure a little money."

"There is our music," said Juliet, "and Mrs. Stirling praises your manner of teaching; and I might succeed, too, if we could find any pupils."

"We must think of something else," said Matilda; "for since the foreign pianist, with the fine-sounding Italian name, has come to Riverton in her tour through the provinces, there is no chance of success for any other teacher. She gives lessons for a shilling to one person."

"And to two for eighteenpence," said Juliet.

"I should be most glad," said Matilda, "to earn even that small sum; but every shopkeeper or farmer, who has a daughter to learn music, sends her to this foreigner."

"Well," said Juliet, "they only follow the example of their betters, who, overlooking native talent, give the preference to some inferior signora, or signor, merely because they were not born in England."

"There is drawing," said Matilda; "but I fear we are not capable of teaching that art."

"And if we were," said Juliet, "we could not hope for scholars; for there is Mr. Painter, who comes to Riverton to attend the schools once a week, and he is always ready to give private lessons, when there is anybody to take them."

"I sometimes think," said Matilda, "that if we could make a collection of small drawings, figures, or still life, or any taking subjects, we might perhaps be able to sell them."

"If we lived almost anywhere but at Riverton, perhaps so," said Juliet; "but who would buy them here?"

"No one," said Matilda, sighing; "and our drawings would not be good enough to find purchasers in

London or any large town, even if we had the means of getting them there."

"Do you not think," said Rupert, "that Mrs. Stanley, or some of the ladies we know, would buy some of your drawings?"

"Mrs. Stanley has a first-rate collection of drawings herself," said Matilda, "and Mrs. Graham's daughters draw as well as we do; and I do not think any of the other ladies of our acquaintance care much about the fine arts. Besides, it would be like asking charity, to offer drawings of so little value as ours, and I could not bear that."

"Nor I neither," said Juliet.

"I wish I was a man," exclaimed Rupert, "and could work for you both, my dear sisters, and little Kate too. Oh! what a holiday we two will have, when we have got rid of Pringle; we will make a bonfire, and burn her in effigy."

The sisters again broke into a laugh; but Matilda recovering herself, said gravely—

"You must not give way to feelings of that sort, my dear Rupert, even in joke. Miss Pringle is very disagreeable to you, and often teazes you, I know; but I feel sure that at this minute if you were asked to do her a service you would consent."

"I suppose I ought," replied the boy.

"And you would," said Matilda.

"I would do anything to please you, my own dear sister," said Rupert, throwing his arms round Matilda, and affectionately kissing her.

"And because it is right," said Matilda, pressing her brother to her, and then stroking his glowing cheek; she added, "the satisfaction we feel in doing what is right lessens all our misfortunes, and however unhappy we may think ourselves from our want of money, it is a great consolation to reflect that we have not brought our troubles upon us by our own misconduct."

"I do not see anything that we can do," said Juliet, "unless we find something to sell."

"We have nothing of our own that is of much value, I fear," said Matilda. "There is the furniture, and the books, and the pictures; cannot we sell some of them?" inquired Juliet.

"They are not our own," remarked her sister; "they are papa's."

"I know," replied Juliet, "but if he cruelly leaves us to starve, we must help ourselves."

"Oh! do not speak unkindly of papa," exclaimed Matilda; "there is some cause or other I am certain that we do not know of, that prevents our hearing from him."

"Whatever may be the cause," said Juliet, "the effect upon his children is very sad, and I think if he cared at all for us, he would contrive—"

"I have thought of something," interrupted Matilda, joyfully: "our coins; I am surprised I did not think of them before. Do you not recollect when dear mamma gave us her box of coins she told us they were valuable, and had been collected by her father?"

"Who was a great antiquary," said Juliet.

"And," continued Matilda, "mamma said—poor mamma, it was just as though she had a presentiment of the state of want we should one day be in,—that we were not to hoard them up if the sale of them would be advantageous to us."

"I remember," said Juliet; "but who is there at Riverton that would part with their money for anything so useless as I daresay they would consider old coins?"

"I wish I had known of these coins in the morning," said Rupert; "for when I went to Wheeler's about Mr. Stirling's watch, there came an old gentleman into his shop and asked him if there were not some Roman remains near the town, and inquired if he had got any old coins to sell that had been picked up in the neighbourhood."

"Oh! what a chance," exclaimed Juliet, "it would have been for us, to have disposed of ours, if we had but known of this old gentleman."

"Perhaps he is not gone," said Matilda, eagerly.

"Miss Pringle knows all about him, I daresay," said Juliet; "she always knows everything about everybody; I will run and ask her."

"Stay," said Matilda, laying her hand on her sister's arm to detain her; "do not let us take Miss Pringle into our confidence. Let us send Rupert into the town to make inquiries, he will manage the matter well, I know."

"I will go to the Crown," said Rupert, "and ask Tom the hostler, if there is a strange gentleman staying at the inn."

"Run away then," said Juliet, "as quick as you can; I should not be surprised if you find him there. If he is come antiquity hunting, he would most likely remain here some little time."

Rupert's errand was successful, for in a short time he came gaily running up to his sisters, who had not left their room, and exclaimed—"I have found him, and he is down stairs in the parlour."

"And what sort of man is he?" inquired Juliet, eagerly; "will he buy?"

"I cannot tell that," replied the boy; "but Mr. Goodall, that is his name, seems a kind and gentlemanly man, and was quite willing to come and look at the valuable coins I told him my sisters had."

"I will go down to him directly," said Matilda, hastening off with her little box of treasures; which she soon displayed before the scrutinizing eyes of the antiquary.

After Mr. Goodall had carefully examined the collection, he selected about a dozen coins, which were all, he said, that possessed any particular value, and naming a price, he asked Matilda if she would be willing to take it.

The specified sum was so far beyond what Matilda

had imagined her whole collection even was worth, that with eyes sparkling with pleasure she joyfully exclaimed that she should be most happy to receive in exchange for her coins the money Mr. Goodall proposed giving; and she was preparing to pack them up when the gentleman stopped her, and inquired if she knew the value of what she was disposing of.

Matilda said she was wholly ignorant on the subject.

"I thought so," said Mr. Goodall, smiling; "and as that is the case, I wish to know if you have not some friend or other, some virtuoso, who would give his opinion on the business, and say if I offer a fair exchange. I should not otherwise be contented to take your coins, young lady; however willing you might be trust to a stranger."

The girl expressed her obligation for so much kind consideration, and with her sister and brother debated for a few minutes who among their acquaintance possessed any knowledge respecting rare coins. They quickly ran over the names of several of their friends and neighbours, but no one appeared likely to be of use in the business, till Rupert mentioned Mr. Stirling, and then Matilda remembered to have heard that that gentleman was a collector in a small way, and that he would be the person to refer to. This point being settled, it was agreed that Mr. Goodall should accompany some of the juvenile party to Mr. Stirling's house, taking with them the selected coins.

Mr. Stirling, in his character of referee, gave an impartial judgment, and decided that Mr. Goodall offered a just equivalent for the coins he desired to have, and Matilda leaving the two gentlemen to a further examination of their merits, hastened home with her money in better spirits than she had felt for a long while.

With the dislike to having a debt, which was almost instinctive in her, she immediately on entering the house repaired to her own room, and put aside the amount of the half-a-year's house-rent last due,

to be forwarded to the landlord the first convenient opportunity. She next despatched Rupert to the post-office for some stamps, which she enclosed with a kind letter, and sent off to her old friend Mrs. Rushton, who she feared was often much in want of a little more money than her very scanty means afforded her. This last action was a true and lively pleasure to Matilda, for it was very long since she had had it in her power to make poor Ann a little present.

The being relieved from the immediate want of money was a great comfort to Matilda, and it seemed to impart fresh energy to her, enabling her to bear better the various annoyances to which she was constantly exposed.

No event of importance occurred to vary the usual routine of her present life for some weeks after receiving the sum of money Mr. Goodall paid for the coins. Juliet and she were now very seldom invited out, for Miss Pringle always forced herself in wherever the girls were asked, and she was so universally considered a disagreeable person, that every one was desirous of shunning her company, and the Lonsdales were consequently often left out of little parties to which they had hitherto been accustomed to be invited. Both Matilda and Juliet were sensible of this change, and attributed it to its right cause. The circumstance was not at all pleasant to Juliet, and she began to doubt if the constant companionship of the lively and entertaining Miss Pringle made her sufficient amends for the loss of other amusements. Still Juliet was generally constant in her allegiance to her favourite companion, and firmly believed that all her defalcations of payment would be made up at the termination of her law-suit; which said law-suit the lady affirmed was most vexatiously protracted, owing to the well-known uncertainty of the law.

In the estimation of the elder sister, Miss Pringle continued the same meddling, disagreeable, and

unprincipled person as ever, always exciting some unpleasant feelings or disturbance in the family, scolding, finding fault, and interfering with things that did not concern her. She never, for any length of time together, gave up her attempts to become house-keeper, and to sit at the head of the table; and, above all, she still continued to persecute her young hostess with her troublesome demands to be put into the occupation of Mr. Lonsdale's room.

One morning, when Matilda had just entered this said room with the little servant, to give it its weekly attendance, Juliet came running to her to say that Mrs. Stirling was at the door in a carriage, and as the day was damp and cold for Matilda to walk to her house to give the music lesson, she said she would, if agreeable, convey her there in the carriage. Matilda, who was at the time suffering from a cough and cold, gladly availed herself of the offer, and left Juliet to superintend the arrangements in her papa's chamber, at the same time charging her to lock the door carefully after it was finished, and deposit the key in its usual place.

Juliet, who in some degree shared her sister's hopes and wishes respecting her father, was careful to discharge this little duty properly, and after having left everything about the room as bright and clean as broom and cloths could make it, she was just coming out and locking the door, when at the same moment Miss Pringle came tripping up stairs.

At sight of Juliet issuing out of this coveted apartment the lady suddenly paused, and quick as thought, made up her mind to put in execution a plan she had long meditated, but hitherto without success —it was neither more nor less than to obtain possession of the key of Mr. Lonsdale's room, and having secured that, to make good her entrance; and, once established, there to remain. She had long sought to discover where the key of this sanctum was kept, but had never yet found out; now she beheld it in Juliet's

hand, and knowing her power over the thoughtless girl, she determined by some artifice or other to get it from her. Having made up her mind as to the mode of proceeding, she passed on without appearing particularly to notice Juliet; but in a moment she called from her room,—

"Juliet, Juliet dear; pray come here and assist me. See what I have done!" continued she, as the young girl hastened to her call; "I have thrown down all my nice clean cuffs and collars, just come home from the laundress, and then upset a water-jug close by them; help me quick, dear—pick them up, or they will be spoiled!"

Juliet lent her willing assistance, and having rescued the delicate articles from their perilous situation, Miss Pringle asked her to carry them all down stairs for her, while she herself followed with some dresses. Both ladies deposited their burdens on the table, but Juliet still held the key in her hand. Miss Pringle's manœuvre so far had not answered.

"Can you help me measure the length of this dress?" said the artful lady; "I have work to do in haste, and I want a little assistance, and do you know I have such a piece of news for you!"

"Have you?" said Juliet, eagerly.

"Yes," replied her companion. "I have something to tell you that will amuse you most highly. Lay hold here, dear, will you," continued she, putting her dress towards Juliet. "That is right; now I will measure—but take both hands. Well, my news is, that old Greenhorn is going to be married."

"You do not surely mean so?" exclaimed Juliet; "you cannot be serious in saying that that old man, with nine sons and daughters, and with I do not know how many grand-children, is going to be married!"

"As sure as you stand there, he is," said Miss Pringle, "and I know who the happy lady is."

"You do?" said Juliet.

"Yes; and I will make you as wise as myself—you

hold the dress very badly for me, dear; you have something in your hand, what is it? Oh! a key, I see; lay it down, please, and hold the silk a little tighter."

Juliet unsuspecting evil, did as she was desired.

A gleam of satisfaction overspread Miss Pringle's false countenance; but her work was only begun; the key was out of Juliet's hand, but how was she to get it into hers? and then, having got it into her possession, how was she to retain it? "I must," thought she, "put this silly, gossip-loving girl thoroughly off her guard, and make her forget how she was recently employed;" and for this artful purpose, Miss Pringle went on chatting away about the venerable bridegroom, set the girl to guess who was the young bride, described the dresses, told who made the wedding-cake, and who furnished the champagne, with a variety of other interesting particulars, interspersing her histories with many lively and sarcastic remarks. During all this time Miss Pringle was occupying herself about her dresses, unfolding, examining, and spreading them out over the table, at the same time hiding the key from view.

"Look here," said she, after a time, "I want your advice, dear Juliet; you have so much taste in dress; and I should like your opinion. Shall I take the trimming off this blue dress, and put it on to this purple one?"

Juliet replied that she thought the change would be advantageous.

"I will do it then; but," continued Miss Pringle, rummaging in her work-basket, "I have no silk of the right colour. Will you kindly step to Glossop's for me, and get me a skein or two to match? and when there, bring me two or three yards of narrow black ribbon. I have no time to go out any more this morning myself; but if you will go for me, I will tell you something more about the wedding—perhaps the most amusing circumstance of all."

"I will run for you directly," said Juliet, gaily. "How amusing you are!"

"I am pleased to be so to you, dear," returned Miss Pringle; "and if, when you come in, you will help me a little with my dresses, we will have a nice long chat together."

"With pleasure," said Juliet; and, hastening away for her bonnet and mantle, she set off to the shop to make the required purchases.

No sooner was the street-door closed upon Juliet, than, seizing the key of Mr. Lonsdale's room, Miss Pringle flew up stairs, unlocked and set wide open the door, then entering her own apartment, she pulled forward her trunks and boxes, and dragging them across the little corridor, lodged them inside the forbidden chamber. She then, quick as lightning, spread a large cloth on the ground, and turned the contents of her drawers in to it, tied it up, and lodged it beside her boxes; she then gathered together a variety of miscellaneous articles that were dispersed about in different parts of her room, and making a few hasty transits backwards and forwards, she worked so well, that she had transported all her own property from the one room to the other before Juliet returned. She was standing triumphantly regarding the fruits of her exertions, when a slight cloud passed over the sun of her happiness. The thought suggested itself to her mind,—"Was a bed that had been so long unoccupied as Mr. Lonsdale's in a fit state to receive such a treasure as herself?" She had just decided that it certainly was not, and was pondering what could possibly be done in such a dilemma, when she heard Juliet enter the house. The girl must be got out again, there was no doubt about that; and speedily deciding what she would do, the plotting lady hastened down, and, with many apologies for troubling her again, begged Juliet to return to the shop for some trifle or other she had forgotten.

Juliet made no difficulty in complying, and Miss Pringle remounted the stairs, but not as before with *elastic* spring, but with the slow tread of grave medi-

tation. She entered her room, gazed at her bed and mattresses, which were large and heavy, drew herself up, stretched forth her arms as if calculating her powers, and then, with desperate resolution, drew the bed off its resting-place, and with infinite difficulty conveyed not only that, but all belonging to it, into Mr. Lonsdale's room. There she repeated the same operation, with this difference, that she made no attempt to remove the articles which she pulled off, leaving them lying at the foot of the bedstead. But the hardest part of the undertaking remained yet to be accomplished—the putting the heavy appendages to comfort in their right place. In vain she tried first one scheme and then another; she found her strength quite inadequate to the task. This was by no means agreeable; but she trusted to the chapter of accidents to make all this matter come right; and in the mean time she comforted herself with the thought that she could sleep one night very well on the floor.

Thus re-assured, she looked once more triumphantly round the apartment that she had so cleverly taken possession of, came out of it, locked the door, and deposited the key in her pocket. She then took the precaution of securing the entrance to her own room also, lest any intruder should become aware of her flight before she thought fit to announce the fact herself.

So expeditious had she been, that by the time Juliet returned a second time from Glossop's, Miss Pringle was seated composedly at her work; and so well pleased was she with the success of her manœuvre, that she talked away with unusual glee, and amused her companion so highly, that it never occurred to the thoughtless girl to seek for the key which she had been so careless about.

Circumstances seemed to favour Miss Pringle, for before dinner a note arrived from Matilda, stating that Mrs. Stirling had particularly requested her to spend the remainder of the day with her, as she had some musical friends staying in the house.

Matilda was detained so late that, on her return home, she found that Miss Pringle had retired to rest, and Juliet, who happened to be very tired, had gone to bed also, and was fallen fast asleep. Matilda was careful not to disturb her sister, and after making, according to custom, some notes in her diary, saying her prayers, and reading a chapter in the Bible, she sought her couch, and passed the night in peaceful slumbers, wholly unconscious of the disagreeable discovery that awaited her in the morning.

Miss Pringle possessed a great deal of nerve (perhaps, if it had not been speaking of a lady, a far stronger term would have been more appropriate), still she was not without a feeling of slight embarrassment under her peculiar circumstances, and it had cost her some little consideration how it would be best to act; and she finally decided "to carry it with a high hand."

In accordance with this plan, she suffered the breakfast hour to arrive without making her appearance in the parlour; but, as soon as she imagined the family were assembled there, she rose from her bed, and first unlocking the door, rung a loud peal on the bell, and then returned to her resting-place.

At the unwonted sound of Mr. Lonsdale's bell, Matilda started and looked at Juliet, whose surprise for a moment equalled her own.

"Surely that was papa's bell," exclaimed Matilda. "What can it mean?" and hastening out of the room, she ran up stairs, followed by the children and by Juliet, over whose mind an uncomfortable feeling was stealing, as the recollection flashed upon her mind that she had left the key the day before on the table where Miss Pringle had been sitting at work.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed she, "I forgot the key; how sorry I am." But Matilda heard her not; for, turning the handle of the door and pushing it open, she beheld a sight which engrossed all her faculties—her father's room in total disorder, all its arrange-

ments disturbed, crammed with strange boxes, and in the middle, on a bed on the floor, Miss Pringle reposing. For a moment she stood riveted to the spot, scarcely able to believe the evidences of her senses. It seemed impossible that the room she so carefully guarded, and which contained so many cherished objects, sacred in the eyes of filial love, should be thus transformed, and taken possession of by a person who, of all others, was the most disagreeable and objectionable to her.

As soon as the agitated girl could find words to speak, she exclaimed,—

"Miss Pringle, what is the meaning of this? How dare you enter a room I have positively declared you never should occupy?"

"Miss Lonsdale," said the lady thus addressed, rising majestically, and sitting stiffly upright in her bed, "I would ask you in turn, how you dare speak in such a way to a lady who is boarding and lodging with you? I hardly know if I ought to answer you; but I condescend to say, that as you thought it proper to put me in a room which was not fit for me to inhabit, I took it upon myself to change to one more suitable."

For a moment this strange answer silenced Matilda; but it was for a moment only, for, provoked and angry as she felt, her quick perception of character caused her to see through Miss Pringle's motives for assuming this haughty style of expression; and making a strong effort over herself, she changed her own tone to that of calm authority, and desired the lady instantly to leave the apartment.

There was something in Matilda's manner, together with the remembrance of former instances of firmness, that made Miss Pringle think fit to change her mode of conducting herself, and with this view she threw herself back on the bed, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes, faltered out, "I am ill, very ill."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Matilda, impatiently; "ill!

I do not believe you; you who could use the strong exertion you must have done yesterday, in stripping your room and filling this, cannot be ill; but," continued she, hastening to the far side of the apartment, and raising a picture from the ground, "what is this I see? my dear mamma's portrait thrown down, and a hole pierced through the canvas."

"And, look here!" cried Rupert; "here is papa's flute broken;" and the boy gathered the pieces from off the floor.

"Oh! how could you be so cruel?" cried Matilda, in great distress. "Was it not enough that you found your way into this forbidden room, but that you must injure and destroy what I most value?"

"How could I help it?" murmured Miss Pringle from her couch; "how could I alone manage to bring in what I wanted? It is all your own fault; you know you would not let me enter quietly; if you had, nothing would have been injured."

Rupert offered to take the portrait out of his sister's trembling hands into another room; at the same time he whispered to her, that no important part of the picture was injured. Juliet took up first one thing, and then another, that had belonged to her father, and moved them to a place of safety, while Matilda made another effort to make Miss Pringle quit the room, representing to her in strong terms the impropriety and impertinence of her conduct. But the lady was immovable, and commenced such a violent fit of crying and sobbing,—got up for the occasion,—that the disconcerted girl could not make herself heard.

Feeling the inutility of further contest at the present time, Matilda, with her brother and sisters, withdrew from the room, and went down into the parlour, where a cold breakfast awaited them. Here Matilda's feelings gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears, which for some time she was unable to control. Juliet cried heartily too, and blamed herself greatly for her inattention to her sister's caution, of putting

the key of her father's room in a place of safety. She lamented her folly to Matilda, and begged her to excuse her; and the genuine distress she exhibited at length roused Matilda from her own sorrowful emotions, and she played the part of comforter to her sister.

"It was I," said Juliet, thoroughly roused to a sense of Miss Pringle's contemptible conduct, and indignant at the way in which she had been tricked into lending her unconscious assistance in the affair; "it was I that brought this person into the house, and have been the means of causing you, dear Matilda, so much vexation."

"If we could only get rid of her entirely," said Matilda, after kindly bidding her sister leave off crying, "I should be most truly rejoiced. It is the thought that she is a fixture that has affected me, even more just now, than her having taken possession of dear papa's room, painful as that is to me."

The sisters then consulted together about the possibility of dislodging their boarder, if not altogether from the house, at any rate from the occupation of Mr. Lonsdale's room. Juliet then related the whole of the artful plan that Miss Pringle had pursued in order to get her out of the way, while she accomplished her long-desired object of getting into the forbidden apartment.

"I shall never listen to another gossiping history again with patience, I am certain," exclaimed Juliet, as she finished her narration.

Rupert, who had been an attentive listener to all that Juliet said, broke forth into loud bursts of indignant displeasure, and declared that, "if he was only a little bigger, he would go and turn Miss Pringle at once out of the room. I have a good mind to try as it is;" and he was hastening out of the room to endeavour to put his threat into execution, when Matilda called him back, persuaded him to eat his breakfast, and *go off* to school.

Matilda then prevailed upon Juliet to sit down to the table, and the girls both attempted to take a little sustenance, of which they stood greatly in need; it being a long while past their usual breakfast hour, and they were exhausted by the disagreeable event of the morning.

They had scarcely begun their repast when the bell from above was rung again, and followed up by a succession of loud peals.

"What are we to do?" exclaimed Matilda.

"She will break the bell," cried Juliet.

"I will answer her," said Rupert; and before he could be stopped, he rushed to the head of the stairs, and called out loudly, "If you want anything, you must come down for it. Nobody shall wait on you while you remain in that room."

"Hush, hush!" said Matilda, following her brother; and calling him down stairs, she desired him to go off immediately to school.

Matilda felt very reluctant that Rupert should be engaged in any domestic broils, or be a witness to the frequent noisy disputes that Miss Pringle was in the habit of carrying on with all those who did not conform immediately to her views, or who in any way displeased her. The boy was of a lively and impetuous disposition, exceedingly warm-hearted, and devotedly attached to his sisters, especially the elder; and Matilda feared, lest in his zeal he might give way to contentions and angry feelings, that would eventually injure his temper. She was equally watchful over Kate; but the little girl was much younger, and of a quieter temperament than her brother.

The bell kept ringing, and Susan, the little maid, who was at length despatched to learn the cause of such repeated peals, came down, saying that—

"Miss Pringle says she is dying of faintness, and desires to have some breakfast sent her upstairs directly."

"Tell her," said Juliet, in reply, "that her breakfast is ready for her in the parlour."

Susan did as desired, but in a few moments returned, looking frightened, and exclaiming that Miss Pringle was in fits.

The sisters looked at each other, and exchanged a smile; but it soon became no laughing matter, for the lady above sent forth such a succession of screams, that Matilda, thinking her ill-behaved boarder would alarm the neighbourhood, ran up and begged her not to conduct herself in so discreditable a manner.

Matilda's presence had a quieting effect on Miss Pringle, for she had obtained what she wanted, namely, a parley with her young hostess, without either sending for her or leaving her room, which she had not the slightest intention of doing at present.

"I must beg," said Matilda, in a tone expressive of much displeasure, "that you will not cause a disturbance in the house; if you do, I must send for some one who will exercise a control over you."

"Send for a doctor," faltered out Miss Pringle. "I shall die with these fits if you do not; they are quieter just now, but will come on again shortly."

Matilda turned to leave the room, with the intention of complying with this request, thinking that perhaps under such strange circumstances, it was the best thing she could do; but she was impatiently called back by the lady, who entreated her, if she had any charity left, to send her some breakfast; and she also said, that before she saw the doctor, the bedding must be placed on the bedstead, "for what," added she, "will he think of seeing me—your boarder—lying on the floor?"

"It is a matter of entire indifference to me," replied Matilda, calmly, "how the doctor sees my boarder. But for your own sake, I would advise you to rise, and try and conduct yourself in a more becoming manner."

Miss Pringle's eyes flashed angrily; but, still determined to play her part, she said, "You are most unfeeling." Then in a moment after she added, "Will you send me some breakfast, or must I starve?"

"I will send for the doctor directly," said Matilda.

"Not till I have first had some breakfast, I implore," cried the lady of sham fits.

Matilda would willingly have remained firm to her intention of making Miss Pringle come down stairs, but the kindness of her nature prevented her from longer refusing the request of her boarder; for she said to herself, "I have no doubt Miss Pringle feels exhausted, if it is only with her violent emotions, and it would take her some time to dress. So this once she shall be indulged."

When Miss Pringle received her breakfast, she sent word down that she felt better, and would not have the doctor sent for. The lady had not the slightest intention of consulting a medical man; the wish she had expressed to see one, was merely a *ruse* on her part to have the bedding put in its proper place; but failing in this, she said nothing more about the doctor; at the same time it suited her views to play the part of an invalid for the present. It was her policy to keep constantly in Mr. Lonsdale's room for some time, thinking that if the girls got accustomed to her occupying it, they would cease their opposition on the subject. At the same time the order of things was not commodious; she could not establish herself in the state she had proposed; the drawers were crowded up with bed furniture, and the wardrobe could not be conveniently got at; her own property strewed the floor, and ran the risk of being injured. She felt it would be wholly useless to ask Matilda to have the room arranged for her, and she consequently decided that she must rely on her own resources.

In the afternoon she expected the laundress, who, on her arrival, was for some little time closeted with

her employer, and in half an hour from the time she left her, a stout, strong-looking man arrived, who said he wished to speak to Miss Pringle for a moment on particular business. Susan, who brought up the message, was desired to say that the lady was ill, and he must come upstairs and speak to her outside the door.

The interview began, but did not terminate there, for the man was called in by Miss Pringle, and in a few minutes he came out again, bearing with him the bedding belonging to Mr. Lonsdale's room, which he deposited in the lady's former apartment, and the next time Susan attended upon the boarder, she reported that "Miss Pringle was no longer lying on the floor, but that she was comfortable in bed, and the room all in order."

Thus far Miss Pringle had succeeded; but her attempts to have her meals sent up to her were perfectly futile; for whenever she asked for them upstairs, she was told in answer, she must either submit to see a doctor, or she must come down for what she required. The same ill success attended her efforts to get Juliet to come up, and speak to her; for though she rang the bell many times for Susan to carry down all sorts of urgent messages to "dear Miss Juliet," Miss Juliet positively refused to go, and finally desired the little maid not to attend any more to Miss Pringle's summonses.

Thus baffled on all sides, hunger at last compelled the lady to come forth; but she took especial care not to leave her room open, but to secure it against all intruders, by locking and double locking the door, and she retreated to it again immediately after her meals.

Matters proceeded thus for some days, during which time Matilda reflected upon what would be the best means of ejecting the impertinent lady from her father's room. She had no thought of resorting to violent means; for she as usual shrank from the idea of any unpleasant notoriety, and as to watching for

an opportunity to break open the door during any temporary absence of the inhabitant, that was alike unpleasant to her; and she at last determined that she would patiently wait till Mr. Wright returned home, and then consult him as to what measures she could take to rid herself of so great a nuisance. In the mean time she resolved to try every now and then the effect of words, and she sometimes entreated and sometimes commanded her obstinate inmate to give up possession of her papa's room, and return to her own.

Miss Pringle generally heard Matilda with an affectation of much civility, at the same time she did not yield an inch of ground; and always ended the colloquy by saying, "that as she should so soon be leaving Rivington for a more congenial residence, it was not worth while for her herself to be disturbed, or for Matilda to be troubled by making any change."

CHAPTER XVII.

Return to Old Habits. Evening Readings. A Visiter to the Boarder. My Brother Jonas. Vulgar Manners. A Contemptible Class of Ladies. Useless Remonstrance. Unfeeling Intrusion. A Christian's Duty. Resource in Prayer. Unknown Debts. Dismay. Retreat to the Meadows. Painful Reflections. A Burst of Grief. Unexpected Comfort. Confidential Communication. An exceedingly Unpleasant Visiter to one of the Party.

WHEN Miss Pringle felt assured that no other means besides persuasion or command would be used towards her, in order to make her give up the occupation of Mr. Lonsdale's room, and that as long as she kept it locked, she should remain its undisturbed possessor, she returned to her usual habits.

By degrees, too, the reserve with which she had been treated by Juliet greatly wore off; for though the girl never ceased to retain a lively sense of Miss Pringle's unworthy behaviour in the instance just related, she talked and laughed with her again, much as before. Juliet was young, and with her thoughtless character, she found it difficult to resist the efforts Miss Pringle made to ingratiate herself in her favour.

Matilda saw with regret that this unprincipled woman was regaining much of her power over Juliet, and as a means of counteracting her influence, and of putting a stop to a great deal of foolish talking, she persuaded her sister to resume her practice of reading aloud of an evening. Juliet was far from objecting to this proposal, for she was fond of reading, and the evening was always the time allotted for the perusal of books of travels, biography, or any kind of "amusing literature." Juliet might perhaps be said to read well—at any rate she was distinct and free from any unpleasant cadences in her voice, and the books selected

for the evening hour were entertaining: still Miss Pringle objected to the readings; "she preferred chatting, it was so much more sociable;" and she made many attempts to make Juliet discontinue this practice; but Juliet was unpersuadable on this point, for she not only liked it herself, but she had promised her sister that she would persevere.

For a little while before the event concerning Mr. Lonsdale's room took place, Miss Pringle had shown a disinclination to have Juliet as a companion in her walks, frequently making the excuse when her young friend expressed a wish to accompany her, that she was going to call on some one or other where it would not be convenient to take her, or that she was only going to step out for five minutes, when in the latter case it often happened that Miss Pringle did not return home for hours.

Juliet's curiosity was excited on the subject, and it was in some measure gratified, by Rupert's telling her one morning, that he had once or twice seen "Pringle" walking with a gentleman; but that she had not perceived him, though he was near enough to discover that her companion had not much the air and character of a gentleman.

Of late, Juliet had made no proposal to be the companion of Miss Pringle in her walks; her mind appeared to be recovering a healthier tone, which was in a great measure owing to the examples of virtue and good conduct set before her in the books she perused. But while her own love for the evening readings increased, Miss Pringle's dislike to them was very considerably augmented; and she determined within herself to put a stop to them, and provide herself with more agreeable amusement.

The party were sitting round the table one evening, Juliet reading aloud, Rupert and Kate drawing, and Matilda and her boarder working, when they were startled by a loud knock at the door—a very unusual circumstance now of an evening—which was followed

by the announcement, from the little maid, of "A gentleman who called to see Miss Pringle," at the same time that a short thick-set man, with bristling red hair, walked into the parlour. At sight of him, Miss Pringle started up, and hurrying towards him, with expressions of the most lively pleasure, exclaimed,—

"My dear brother! is it possible? When did you return? How delighted I am to see you!"

The person thus addressed did not appear to share greatly in the ecstasies of the lady, but, looking towards the Misses Lonsdale, he bowed somewhat awkwardly; and a shrewd observer might have perceived a something in his manner, as though the young ladies into whose presence he was thus unceremoniously ushered were very different persons from what he had expected to see.

The girls, who possessed the ease of manner belonging to well-bred persons, addressed a few general observations to the stranger, but receiving no other answer than monosyllables, with ma'am added to each, they quietly resumed their respective occupations, and left "my brother Jonas" (such was the name by which he was introduced) to the undisturbed enjoyment of his lively sister's prattle.

It appeared, from the lady's questioning rather than from the gentleman's answers, that he was just returned from abroad; but Rupert declared that he felt almost certain that Mr. Jonas was the very identical man he had seen Miss Pringle walking with, and moreover, his answers to his sister showed that his geography was very much at variance with the places he was supposed to have visited.

After a time the gentleman withdrew, and, as the girls hoped, for ever; but they were completely disappointed, for in an evening or two after he reappeared; and this visit was followed by several others, till at last scarcely an evening passed without the intrusion into the family circle of Mr. Jonas.

Of all Miss Pringle's inflictions upon her young hostess, this was perhaps the worst. The man was evidently of low origin, and deficient in education; but his manners, which were at first shy and unobtrusive, soon changed, and he became familiar, assured, and forward.

In a little while he appeared quite as much at home as if he had been long known to the family in which he intruded his unwelcome presence.

It was impossible to carry on the usual evening employments when he was by; for if Juliet read, if he did not interrupt her by troublesome questions or remarks, he would prevent others listening, by talking in a loud strain to Miss Pringle. If the girls resorted to music, to forget if possible the disagreeable man's presence, he would offend against all taste and good breeding, by whistling or humming the airs in unison, or by noisily beating time on the table. Sometimes he would give long histories of adventures little to the credit of the actors in them, or he would pass off some hackneyed joke for his own, and laugh boisterously as he repeated it.

All the young party were subject to his familiar and often impertinent remarks, except Matilda, who alone possessed the power of repelling him. Her gravity and dignified silence chilled, if it did not awe him, and he never ventured to address her except in terms of respect.

But though exempt herself from personal annoyance, the man's manners were not the less offensive to her; and it occasioned her an unpleasant feeling when, in spite of their determination not, Juliet and Rupert could not now and then restrain their laughter at some piece of vulgar drollery, got up for the express purpose of being agreeable.

Miss Pringle appeared delighted with Mr. Jonas, and paid the most scrupulous attention to all he said or did; at the same time she occasionally displayed unpleasant humours towards him, at those times when

he seemed wholly intent upon pleasing the Lonsdales to the neglect of herself.

It would have been thought that this man's presence was enough, without any additional cause of annoyance; but, after a time, to the utter disgust and displeasure of the juvenile party, Mr. Jonas drew from his pocket a short pipe, and began smoking. Matilda, hardly able to restrain her anger, commanded the man to desist from his odious employment, which, after making a considerable difficulty about, he did. It was evident that, on this evening, Mr. Jonas had obtained a little false courage, from having dined at some public meeting. But however that might be, he once or twice again made the attempt, and when ordered to leave off, he made himself amends for his disappointment by uttering several cutting remarks, as he intended them to appear, upon the strange "whim" of disliking tobacco, and ended by calling to Rupert "to mind and learn to smoke very soon."

"That I will not," said the boy angrily; "I hate the nasty smell; and if I did not, I would never make myself unpleasant to those I live with, by practising so offensive and injurious a habit.

"Dear me! what a fuss, and all about a pleasant scent;" exclaimed Miss Pringle.

Miss Pringle was one of that contemptible class of ladies who strive to make themselves agreeable to gentlemen by encouraging them in the indulgence of offensive and selfish habits.

As regarded her dearest brother Jonas, as she was in the habit of styling this man, she seemed exceedingly anxious to make him as comfortable as possible during his evening visits, and she did not confine herself to words alone, or to a variety of little undefinable attentions all directed to the great end of pleasing him; but she evinced her regard in a more substantial form, by ordering the little maid to bring in supper for him.

From the very beginning of this man's introduction

into the family, Matilda had expressed to Miss Pringle her dislike of and disapproval of his visits, and as time went on and they were still continued, she remonstrated with her boarder in strong terms upon her sanctioning and encouraging the presence of a person to whom she so entirely objected.

At first Miss Pringle replied that it was very strange that she could not be allowed quietly to see her dear brother, from whom she had been parted a long while; and then finding Matilda still persisted in her objections, she assumed a high tone, and said that she had a right to see whomever she pleased; and she added, that she never knew an instance of a boarder not being allowed to bring to the house whatever company she thought fit.

Matilda felt the utter helplessness of her situation. Miss Pringle was as impenetrable as a stone, and as immovable as a rock. The presence of this woman had greatly interfered with the poor girl's comfort, but now the unpleasantness of her situation was increased fourfold, by the introduction of a man so every way disagreeable as Mr. Jonas.

Besides the pecuniary loss that she suffered from her boarder, the additional expense of this man's suppers was no trifle where the means were so limited; and when she told Miss Pringle that she could not afford to provide her brother with his evening meals, she briefly said,

"Put all down to my charge," and immediately either turned the conversation or left the room.

All this time no news arrived from Mr. Lonsdale, and the want of money was beginning again to make itself severely felt. Matilda was truly unhappy, her life now passed in almost one continued round of vexation and disappointment. She sometimes felt as though she must sink under the accumulation of painful circumstances which pressed around her; but there was one thing that weighed more heavily on her *mind* than all the rest, and that was the fear that she

should fail in her duty as a Christian. She knew that she ought to be gentle, patient, and forbearing under all the trials that were sent her. But there were times when, oppressed by the want of money, and irritated by the remembrance of the imposition that was practised on her, together with the impertinence to which she was frequently exposed when she thought it would be impossible to command herself, and that her forbearance would forsake her, and that she must give way to outbreaks of temper. It was a severe trial, but Matilda had recourse to earnest prayer for assistance from above, and she generally rose triumphant above temptation.

But great as were Matilda's troubles and sorrows, a new one came upon her, which was as vexatious as it was unexpected. She had gone out one morning to make some necessary purchases in the town, when on passing a shop where poultry was sold, she asked the price of a fine fowl, and finding that it would not be more expensive than meat, she ordered Mrs. Gosling, the mistress of the shop, to send it home, meaning to pay for it on delivery.

Finding that Mrs. Gosling made some difficulty on the subject, Matilda asked for an explanation, when she was told in answer, that the owners of the shop would prefer not supplying any more articles till those which had been already ordered were paid for.

Matilda felt bewildered and begged Mrs. Gosling to explain herself more fully, when, to the poor girl's utter consternation and dismay, she was informed that there was a large bill for poultry standing against her.

The truth of the matter flashed instantly into Matilda's mind; Miss Pringle, to save her own purse, had run up a bill in the name of Miss Lonsdale, at the same time that she pretended to her young hostess that she had paid for the articles which she had sent in.

A dizziness seized Matilda, and a film passed over her eyes, and she would have sunk to the ground if

she had not caught against the side of the door for support. Recovering herself in a moment or two, she said to Mrs. Gosling,

"The items in your bill were ordered by Miss Pringle, I suppose; and I was told that they were paid for at the time."

"Oh dear, no!" replied the mistress of the shop, "the lady told me that you preferred having a bill."

A flush of indignation suffused Matilda's cheeks, and she exclaimed,

"It is utterly untrue, I never desired to have a bill anywhere: papa always taught me to pay for everything as I bought it."

"That used, I know, always to be Mr. Lonsdale's way," replied Mrs. Gosling.

Matilda stopped a few minutes longer in conversation on the subject with the owner of the shop, during which she regretted her inability at present to defray the debt, and expressed a hope that her father would soon return and do so. As she passed on, her heart sank with a foreboding fear, that this might not be a solitary instance of Miss Pringle's fraudulent conduct; she remembered the meat that that lady had persisted in sending from a tradesman where she never dealt, and she also called to mind parcels of grocery that had arrived unbidden by herself, the value of which her boarder always deducted from her own weekly account.

With beating heart and trembling steps, Matilda bent her way to Legg's, and then to other shops, at all of which she was informed of the same astounding facts, that there were bills standing in her name. Overwhelmed with feelings of the newest and most painful kind, Matilda hurried out of the town; she did not dare go home, fearing to trust herself, in the present excited state of her feelings, in the presence of [illegible] who had done her such grievous wrong. It [illegible]day for attending at Mrs. Stirling's; it was

Matilda's unrestrained grief.—P. 273

wholly out of her power to go then; but hastening along the road that led to Mrs. Stirling's, she turned into the meadows which had been the scene of many an hour's painful emotion. Quickly passing on to a secluded spot, she sank to the ground, and burst into a flood of almost the bitterest tears she had ever shed. The thought of a debt, under any circumstances, was distressing to her; but here she was involved in debts that she, in the despair of her feelings, felt she never could discharge. In all her troubles, and under all the privations she had endured, the thought that she did not owe a single sixpence had been a source of comfort to her. She would have foregone anything she wished for, or have suffered any want, rather than live dishonestly upon the gains of others.

And then, what was the future she had to look to? She was fixed with a hard-hearted, unprincipled woman, who might do even worse; a woman who was dead alike to reason and remonstrance, and whom she found it utterly impossible to shake off. The hope which she had entertained that Mr. Wright, on his return, would do something for her relief was lost, for she had that morning heard that he was to remain abroad some months longer.

She hid her face in her lap, and cried and sobbed aloud in unrestrained grief. So absorbed was she by the weight of sorrow that pressed so heavily on her, that she did not hear the sound of approaching footsteps, nor was she aware that any one was near her, till a voice close behind called out—

"Hey, dey! what is the matter? Why, you will break your heart if you go on crying so."

Matilda started and sprang to her feet, and looking up, saw standing before her the sturdy figure of Mr. Burke, with his eyes fixed in surprise upon her.

"Why, my little true friend of the book," said he, "what is the matter?" Then changing his tone,

he continued, "No, I see it is not her, it is the other sister, the one who folks say is a better girl still. What is the matter with you?—tell me. Tough old man as I am, I do not like to see any one in such distress: speak; and if there is anything that Sam Burke can do to help you, depend upon it he will."

There is something in the voice of real kindness that always makes its way to the human heart, however oppressed it may be with sorrow.

The kind manner in which Mr. Burke addressed Matilda was not without its weight, and she reflected for a few moments whether she should confide the cause of her troubles to him or not. She was deplorably in need of some one to come forward and espouse her cause; she remembered to have heard her father say that Mr. Burke was a man of sound judgment; and she herself had heard some of his good deeds spoken of not long since; and perhaps, though his manner was abrupt, and his mode of speaking blunt, he might possess more real goodness and benevolence than many whose exterior was more polished, and whose language flowed more gracefully. Another thing in favour of her confiding in Mr. Burke was, that she felt sure that the wish he expressed to know the cause of her sorrow did not arise from any idle curiosity, and also, that he would make no improper use of any communication which she might make to him.

Mr. Burke, who seemed to divine what was passing within her, and that she was doubtful of the propriety of opening her mind to a comparative stranger, said, in an encouraging tone—

"You are in want of a friend, young lady, but you are not sure whether I am the right sort of person to make one of. A crabbed old fellow like me does not seem a very suitable confidant for one of your age, certainly; but I guess that, in the present case, an old head would serve your cause better than a young one. Now, sit down beside me on this fallen tree

and tell me what is the matter, and let me see if I cannot help you."

Thus encouraged, what little reserve Matilda still felt gave way, and placing herself as desired beside the kind-hearted old man, she talked on till she had made him pretty fully acquainted with all her grievances, with this exception, that she did not say that she thought it very strange that she heard nothing from her father. She touched lightly on the subject of his absence, merely stating that she concluded some accidental circumstance either prevented his writing, or detained him from home. At the same time, she did not conceal that she was often very much in want of money, but added, that if it had not been for Miss Pringle, she and her brother and sisters should have done infinitely better.

During Matilda's narrative, Mr. Burke from time to time uttered short sentences, expressive of the interest he took in her affairs; and when she related the painful discovery she had that morning made of her boarder's mean and fraudulent conduct, he exclaimed, in an energetic manner—

"Shame, shame! it is downright dishonesty."

In answer to Mr. Burke's questions as to whether she had any effects of value with her, and if the much-talked-of lawsuit was a *bonâ fide* affair, Matilda replied that she was aware that her boarder possessed some plate that had been left to her by her aunt, for Juliet had seen it; but as regarded the property about which Miss Pringle was at law, she doubted whether it existed anywhere but in the lady's imagination.

Mr. Burke replied, that that was a thing that ought to be seen into, and said he would call and speak to Miss Pringle himself, and inquired of Matilda if after breakfast on the following morning would be a convenient time to make his visit.

Matilda answered that it would; and Mr. Burke, desiring her to say nothing about his proposed call, bid the grateful girl good-bye. Matilda wished to

express how much obliged she felt, but she was stopped by Mr. Burke abruptly saying,—

"Do not thank me—I want no thanks; I undertake to see justice done you, just because mine is a disposition that gets irritated by hearing of cases of imposition, especially when they are practised on the weak and forbearing; and it is to relieve myself, that I try to put them right."

Matilda smiled and shook her head; and Mr. Burke resuming his customary stiff deportment, went on his way.

Matilda's spirits were so revived by this unexpected meeting with a friend, that she regained sufficient composure to go to Mrs. Stirling's, and give her lesson. She was somewhat beyond her usual hour, for which she obtained ready forgiveness, it being positively the first time that the youthful mistress had ever kept her pupils waiting.

Punctuality was one of Matilda's good qualities; and never, since she had failed in her promise to Mrs. Rushton, had she forfeited her word, being most scrupulous always to keep it; and if there was a chance of her not being able to do so, she now always added, "If there is nothing to prevent me, I will do so-and-so."

On the following morning Mr. Burke duly arrived, and was shown into the usual sitting-room, where the ladies were assembled.

After a brief salutation to the girls, the gentleman turned abruptly round to Miss Pringle, and said—

"My business, ma'am, is with you. I desire to know what your intentions are respecting the family you are now staying with?"

There was something very unpleasant to Miss Pringle's feelings in the look and manner of her questioner, and, taken quite by surprise, she replied—

"My intentions! what do you mean, pray, sir?"

"I mean," replied Mr. Burke, "when do you pay Miss Lonsdale all the pounds, shillings, and pence

you owe her for your board and lodging; and when do you take your departure from her house?"

Miss Pringle, whom it was a difficult thing to disconcert, pertly answered—

"I should be very glad to know by what right you take upon yourself to question me."

"By the right," said Mr. Burke indignantly, "that a man feels he has to step forward in defence of the young and oppressed."

"Oppressed, indeed!" said the lady, with a toss of her head; "Miss Lonsdale is quite capable of taking care of her own interests; she has treated me with much meanness; she has been rude and unfeeling to me, and—"

"Silence!" cried Mr. Burke, interrupting her, "pay her what you owe her, and take yourself off in a week from this time. In the absence of Mr. Lonsdale, I come forward as the friend of his daughter, whom you, a cold-hearted, selfish, and unfeeling woman, have fixed yourself upon, withholding her just dues, and imposing upon her with fraudulent transactions."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Pringle, "one would think I was a swindler, to hear how you talk. If I am a little behindhand in my payments, Miss Lonsdale knows perfectly well that all will shortly be made up to her; she knows that I am expecting to step into a very pretty fortune, directly."

"Humph!" said Mr. Burke, "a fortune; pray, where is it to come from?"

"How very queer you are," said Miss Pringle, "what strange questions you ask."

"I do not care where the fortune comes from," said Mr. Burke, "if you pay Miss Lonsdale on the spot all you owe her, and deposit the money for the goods you have ordered from different shops in the town in her name."

At the latter part of this speech, Miss Pringle appeared slightly confused; she did not expect that a

disclosure of this *feat* of hers would take place so soon; but determining to put a bold face upon her conduct, she said—

"All, and everything to the last farthing I owe, will be paid the moment my lawsuit is settled;" then affecting distress, she put her handkerchief to her eyes, and said it was very unkind, very unfeeling to press so upon her, when she was under a little embarrassment.

"If I thought you really were in distress," said Matilda, her voice assuming its customary kind and gentle tone, "I would be the last person to add to it; but you have acknowledged that your income is the same as when you were living at Green's; and with us your expenses are a good deal less than they were there;" and, added she, after a few moments' pause, "I cannot carry on the housekeeping without money, and you full well know how great my necessity often is."

"I have had calls upon me," said Miss Pringle, "that were quite unexpected, and—"

"Are you going to produce your purse?" interrupted Mr. Burke.

"It is impossible," answered Miss Pringle, "that I can liquidate my little debt till the lawsuit is terminated, and I come into my fortune."

"Pray," said Mr. Burke, "oblige me with the name of your solicitor; I am going to London to-morrow, and I will make it my business to call upon him, and ascertain how long it will be before this happy event takes place."

"I will give it you immediately," said Miss Pringle, rising; "I have the gentleman's card upstairs." So saying, she hastily left the room. In about five minutes she returned, and said she had been unsuccessful in finding her solicitor's card; adding, that she thought she must have lost it, but that she had written down the name and address of the parties who were

employed by her; and she handed Mr. Burke a slip of paper, on which she had written—

"Messrs. Stoneham & Storr,
"No. —, Lincoln's-Inn Fields."

"Very well," said Mr. Burke; "I will make the inquiry, and you shall hear from me again in the course of a few days." So saying, the gentleman took his leave; and Matilda, with a lightened heart, set off to Broomheath to pay a visit to her valued friend Mrs. Rushton, who was just returned home. Miss Pringle was relieved also; but with this difference, that her satisfaction was derived from the absence of Mr. Burke, while Matilda's had arisen from his presence. Hastening up to her room, she remained there locked in till tea-time, sending word that she could eat no dinner; her feelings, as she told Juliet afterwards, being too deeply wounded to allow of her tasting any food.

In the evening Mr. Jonas made his appearance as usual, but, contrary to custom, he was silent and quiet; a few words whispered in his ear on his arrival, appeared to have a sobering effect upon him. On going away, Miss Pringle consigned to his care a box, which a few minutes before she had brought down stairs, and deposited in the hall.

"Here, my dear brother," said she, "is the correspondence of our beloved aunt, which you expressed a desire to see; take the box with you, but for my sake be careful of it. To-morrow, if you will send, you shall have your trunk containing your wearing apparel, which I have had in charge for you during your residence in a hot climate.

Mr. Jonas took up the box containing his aunt's letters, and walked off with it.

Rupert, who saw him raise the box, said that he thought his aunt's correspondence must be very heavy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A Letter from Papa. Relief of Mind. A Welcome Remittance. Perplexity respecting Answers. Carrying off Boxes. Suspicion. Keeping the Temper. Overhauling Goods in a Shop. Making no Purchases. Miss Pringle overpowered with Joy. Promised Presents. Delights in Anticipation. Terror and Despair. The Importance of Twenty Pounds. Gaining a Point. Music Lesson deferred. Astonishing News. Prompt Action.

"WHAT will you give me for what I hold in my hand?" cried Juliet, running into the room where Matilda was sitting looking over her accounts, the morning following Mr. Burke's visit. "Guess what I have got," continued the delighted girl, her face beaming with joy. "No, you will never find out, so I had better tell you at once." So saying, she held forth a letter.

"From papa!" exclaimed Matilda, starting up and seizing the letter. "He is alive, then!" and she breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for the mercy vouchsafed to her.

"Oh! what happiness! Let us see what our dear papa says;" and she tore the letter open, and, with Juliet leaning over her shoulder, read as follows:—

"MY DEAREST MATILDA,—

"Having recently written so fully, and being very busy, I only now send a few lines with the accompanying inclosure. I trust you received my last remittance safe; but I am very uneasy at not hearing from you, and am quite at a loss to imagine why you do not, nor any of you, ever write to me, nor answer any of my letters.

"I continue in the same happy frame of mind, of

which I have recently spoken so much. I seem to know no other feelings than deep gratitude to God, for the change he so graciously wrought in me; and love of the tenderest kind for my dear children.

"With every kind and good wish for you all, I am, my dearest girl,

"Your affectionate Father,

"RUPERT LONSDALE."

"P.S. The money I send is brought to England by a friend, who will lodge it at C—'s banking house, from whence you will receive a draft payable to yourself or order. Write, I entreat you, to me immediately; your silence is most painful."

For some minutes after reading this letter, Matilda was so overcome with joyous and grateful emotions, that she was incapable of speaking; she read its delightful contents again and again, dwelling on each kind and tender expression, and rejoicing at the happy state of her father's mind. But soon the strange circumstance of Mr. Lonsdale's letters, of which he spoke, never having reached Riverton, disturbed and perplexed her. A remittance, too, of money, had been forwarded, and had not arrived at its destination. It appeared most strange, and she and Juliet sat for a long time considering from what the failure could possibly have arisen. Matilda said she would write that very moment to her papa; and got up to procure her writing materials, when the painful fact flashed upon her, that she did not know his address—he had written apparently in haste, and had forgotten to add it.

It was a most distressing case; with every wish to conform to her father's request, and the strongest desire on her own part to communicate with him, she was stopped, from the circumstance of not knowing where to direct her letter. The loss of the other letters was most vexatious, for they no doubt contained an account of what Mr. Lonsdale was doing,

and where he was; on both which points his daughters had the greatest wish to be informed. It was no small source of regret either, that, suffering as they had done for the want of money, a sum which had been forwarded had never reached them.

After having exhausted themselves in conjecture on various points to which Mr. Lonsdale's letter had given rise, Matilda suggested that perhaps, by some fortunate chance or other, Mr. C——, the banker, might know her father's address, or be able to tell how or where a letter could reach him.

Juliet thought it a happy idea, and Matilda wrote immediately; but no good result followed, for a polite answer was returned, stating that the money had been paid into the bank by a stranger, and that Mr. C—— was wholly unacquainted either with the name or address of Mr. Lonsdale.

This source failing, Matilda had nowhere else to apply for the desired information, and she was obliged to console herself with the hope that one of the letters Mr. Lonsdale had spoken of might still arrive, or that he would write again. Grievous as it was to her, with her heart full of the tenderest affection towards him, to appear careless and indifferent, besides causing him so much disappointment, there was nothing to be done. In the mean time, the knowledge that her dear father was alive, and the truly kind tone of his letter, imparted a sense of happiness to her that for a long while she had been a stranger to.

When Matilda had written the letter before mentioned to the London banker, she said she would step and ask Mr. Glossop if he would oblige her by cashing her draft. While putting on her walking-dress, Juliet, who was standing near the window, said,—

"Here is a man with a cart and horse at the door; I wonder what he wants. Oh! I see, he is come for Mr. Jonas's box; but there are two boxes he is taking away, and such large ones! Mr. Jonas must be well off for wearing apparel, I think."

"*If* so," replied Matilda, tying on her bonnet, "it

is odd that he should go so shabbily dressed as he always does."

"I suppose," said Juliet, "his sister has been taking care of his wardrobe for him while he was away—perhaps, repairing it. They are the same boxes she brought with her. She seems very fond of him."

"Yet," said Matilda, "there does not appear that pleasant sort of intercourse and confidence between them one would expect to find in such near relations. Do you know, that I sometimes think they are not really brother and sister."

"Oh, Matilda!" exclaimed Juliet, "how can you say so? how suspicious you always are!"

"I hope I am not so, generally speaking," said Matilda, good-naturedly, "for a suspicious temper is very unamiable."

"*You* are very amiable," returned Juliet, warmly; "how gently you always answer; you never break out impatiently, as others often do, when they are taxed with anything they do not like."

"It would be strange," said Matilda, affectionately embracing her sister, "if I could not keep my temper with one so good-natured as you are, dear Juliet."

"Ah!" replied Juliet, "it is not only with me, but with everybody else that you are so forbearing."

Mr. Glossop made no difficulty in giving Matilda money for her draft on C——'s banking-house; and she was just gathering up the amount received from off the counter, when Miss Pringle entered the shop.

Miss Pringle had heard that Mr. Lonsdale had written. Such good news had spread rapidly through the house; but this did not satisfy the inquisitive lady; she wished to know if Matilda had received a remittance, and, if possible, to what amount. Thinking she might perhaps learn something, she followed her young hostess into the haberdasher's shop (Mr. Glossop was agent for the county bank), and was rewarded for her sagacity by seeing Matilda just depositing her treasure in her purse.

Miss Pringle could not tell the precise amount of

the sum received; but her quick eye detected two ten-pound notes. Without appearing to notice how Matilda had been engaged, she cried out,—

"How fortunate I am to meet you here. I was just wishing for a friend's opinion upon a silk dress I want to purchase. Mr. Glossop has got such a lovely choice. Pray bring some of your prettiest forward," continued she, addressing the shopman.

Matilda was in haste to return home; but she good-naturedly complied with her boarder's request, and remained full half an hour, while Miss Pringle was examining, asking the price, and cheapening half the dresses in the shop, the young man in attendance all the time unfolding and folding them, and answering a multitude of frivolous questions with infinite patience.

At length Miss Pringle rose, and pushing the last dress somewhat contemptuously from her, walked out of the shop without making any purchase.

Matilda was surprised; for though she full well knew the meanness of the lady, she did not think it possible that even she could thus trouble and take up a tradesman's time without making him the return of buying something.

It is to be regretted that ladies are too apt to conduct themselves in shops in the same manner as Miss Pringle did just now.

Matilda had been at home about an hour when Miss Pringle returned, accompanied by her brother. It was the first time Mr. Jonas had made his appearance at the house in the daytime; but he did not attempt to enter the parlour, but accompanied his sister upstairs to her room, where he remained closeted the chief part of the afternoon. On his departure, Miss Pringle appeared to be in a state of restless excitement, going in and out of the house frequently.

The following morning she was also out directly *after* breakfast; but she had not been gone long when

she came hastening back, and rushing into the parlour, caught first Juliet in her arms and then Matilda, and after embracing them with every demonstration of the wildest joy, cried out,—

"Rejoice with me, my friends! I have gained my lawsuit, and shall come into immediate possession of my fortune! Jonas is going off to London this afternoon to sign some papers, and will bring down with him a hundred pounds to defray all expenses."

The girls congratulated Miss Pringle on the happy event, and a flush of triumph crossed Juliet's mind as she remembered that she had never wronged the lady by any serious doubts as to the truth of her statements respecting her expected fortune.

"Let me sit down," said Miss Pringle in tremulous accents; "this news, though expected, has almost overcome me. Jonas had the letter, and he imparted the contents so suddenly, that it was almost too much for me. But I flew to tell you the moment I could: let me show you the letter; where is it? I am so agitated! Oh, here it is;" and she took a note out of an envelope, and handed it to the girls to read.

"You see," continued the lady, "that Messrs. Stoneham and Storr had no doubt as to the ultimate success of the suit, nor had I, in truth—they are such clever men, and my cause was such a just one."

The note was a brief statement of the news Miss Pringle had communicated.

"Now, my dear Miss Lonsdale," said Miss Pringle, as she took back her note, "you shall immediately receive all the money which I am indebted to you, and to others; and I hope you will show that you sympathize with me in my happiness, by allowing me to make you a handsome present over and above what I owe you."

Matilda politely thanked the lady, but declined accepting of her generosity.

"Then you are still angry with me," said Miss

Pringle, "and will not forgive the little irritation of temper the uncertain state of my affairs caused me, I fear, sometimes to display."

Matilda assured her boarder that she was quite willing to forgive and forget everything unpleasant that had passed between them; then saying that it was her day for going to Mrs. Stirling's, she rose and left the room.

No sooner had she closed the door after her, than Miss Pringle turning to Juliet, caught her by the hand, and pressing it warmly, exclaimed,—

"My dear Juliet will not be so unkind as to refuse a present from me." Then faltering in her voice, she added, "It is so cold-hearted, so cutting, I must say, in your sister to refuse the offer I made her, with my heart open to every kind and generous emotion—say, dearest, what shall I give you? No, you shall not choose;" said the lady, again changing her tone to that of great vivacity, "I will decide for you; you shall have a gold chain, ten times more valuable than that you described to me as belonging to Miss Bell."

"Oh! Miss Pringle, how generous you are," exclaimed Juliet.

"No, not generous, dearest; it will be only a little keepsake for you to retain in your memory one who has always loved and admired you more than any girl in existence. You will think of me sometimes, will you not?"

"Very often," replied Juliet.

"And you will come and see us when we are settled? Jonas has already made choice of a delightful villa, distant about five miles from London. We shall keep a pony phaeton, and you and I, with the servant behind, can often drive into London, and go to the exhibition of paintings you so much wish to see; and in the evening we can go to concerts and other places of amusement."

"That would be charming!" said Juliet; and Miss Pringle continued to expatiate on the endless delight

and benefit that her acquisition of fortune would bring to her young friend, till Juliet became nearly as excited as the heiress herself.

At length, reluctantly rising, Miss Pringle said,—

"I must leave you now, dearest; Jonas will wonder what has become of me. I promised to return and make some little preparations for his departure for town this afternoon." So saying, the lady hastened away to join her brother.

She had not been long gone, and Juliet was standing in a delightful reverie concerning gold chains, villas near London, and drives in pony phaetons, when the door was violently thrown open, and Miss Pringle rushed in, looking the picture of terror and despair.

"Oh Juliet, Juliet!" exclaimed she, "was there ever such a piece of ill luck! Jonas; poor Jonas!—it will all be too late!—I shall lose my fortune after all;" and falling down on the sofa, she gave utterance to a succession of hysterical cries.

Juliet amazed, and truly concerned to witness such suffering, begged for an explanation of the cause; but it was some minutes before she could obtain any satisfactory information. At last, amidst sobs and cries and passionate outbreaks against ill-luck and adverse fortune on the part of the distressed lady, the agitated girl gathered that Mr. Jonas had, in the trustfulness of his benevolent nature, become bail for a man who owed twenty pounds; that this man had absconded, and that Mr. Jonas was about to be carried off to prison. But this was not the worst part of the affair, for on Mr. Jonas's being in London that very afternoon depended whether Miss Pringle would have her fortune or not.

A letter had just arrived, expressly stating that a gentleman concerned in the final adjustment of Miss Pringle's affairs was seized with a mortal illness, and that if Mr. Jonas did not immediately fly to receive his dying deposition, all would be lost. There were a good many technical expressions mixed up with this

statement, which somewhat puzzled Juliet, but Miss Pringle said they were necessary to the clear understanding of the case; but she believed she had made it plainly appear that her anticipated fortune, and all its attendant delights, would be lost unless twenty pounds were immediately forthcoming.

"Help me, dearest Juliet," said Miss Pringle, "help me think where, or how, I can procure this sum."

Juliet suggested borrowing it, but Miss Pringle said "she had rather die or lose anything in the world than be indebted to any of the cold-hearted Riverton people for such a favour; besides," added she, with a fresh burst of grief, "who is there among them that would oblige me—not one that I know of?"

Juliet could not deny that she thought this was the case; for she knew, though she would not add to Miss Pringle's grief by saying so, that this lady was no favourite in the place.

"No; there is nothing to be done," continued Miss Pringle, rising and pacing the room with a rapidity surprising in one who had lately exhibited such "entire prostration of strength"—"nothing! And yet, stay," said she, suddenly stopping short, and seizing Juliet's hand with an emotion of delight—

"I am saved! Yes; I am saved! You can lend me the money—your father has sent you a supply."

"So we can," exclaimed Juliet joyfully; for independent of her sorrow for Miss Pringle's distress and regret at the probable loss of her own promised gifts and pleasures, she considered that in helping her friend to secure her fortune, she should at the same time secure the payment of the debts owed to Matilda and others.

"We can lend it you!" repeated Juliet; "Matilda has the money, and I am sure, on such an occasion, would gladly lend it you—she is always very kind. When she returns I will ask her for you."

"When she returns! Oh! Juliet, when she

returns, it will be too late," cried Miss Pringle. "If Jonas does not start directly, he will not be in time to see the dying man. While we are talking, we are losing most precious time. Lend it me yourself, darling girl."

"I cannot without Matilda's consent," replied Juliet; "I wish she was at home."

"But the money your papa sends," said Miss Pringle, "is surely as much yours as your sister's."

"Papa sends it for us all," said Juliet; "but Matilda always has the management of our money matters; she is best fitted for it."

Miss Pringle sank again on the sofa, and hiding her face in her hands, murmured out, "Gone, gone, all gone; house, carriage, presents to my friends, everything;" then again starting up, she threw herself on her knees before Juliet, and implored her in the name of everything that was kind and charitable to take pity on her, and lend her the money.

Juliet, who sincerely wished to do so, and whose feelings were worked up to a high pitch of sorrow and sympathy by the extreme distress she witnessed, said at last, "I really would take upon myself to lend you the money to save you from loss of fortune, if I could get it; but Matilda always keeps the money locked up in a drawer in her room."

"Which drawer?" exclaimed Miss Pringle, rising from her knees and flying up stairs; "which drawer is it?" continued she, as Juliet followed her into the room: "Is there no key that will fit it?" "Perhaps this will," said Juliet, applying a key she had about her to the lock of the drawer which contained the money.

"No, no, that will not do; run and seek for some other," almost screamed Miss Pringle, in the height of her agitation.

Juliet ran to another room, and brought forth a key which answered no better than the first.

"Let us force the lock," said Miss Pringle; "I have a screwdriver in my room;" and she fetched it,

together with a hammer, and was proceeding summarily to open the drawer, when Juliet arrested her arm, saying,—

"Do not spoil the lock; I will try again and find a key to fit;" but she had hardly crossed the landing-place on her errand, when a loud crash brought her back. Miss Pringle in her impatience had burst open the drawer.

"There is no time to lose, dearest Juliet," said Miss Pringle, in a tone of apology; "even now it may all be too late. Oh, give me—give me the money!"

"Twenty pounds you said," said Juliet, drawing forth the bank notes.

"Yes, dearest," replied Miss Pringle, "twenty pounds is the sum; and perhaps," continued she, as her eyes wandered eagerly over the drawer, "you would kindly add another sovereign for fees."

This was an injudicious demand on the lady's part, for either the request itself, or the tone of voice in which it was uttered, jarred somewhat unpleasantly on Juliet's feelings, and a momentary thought crossed her mind whether she was doing right in lending the money.

Miss Pringle saw the hesitation, and instantly exclaimed,—

"Never mind the sovereign, do not think of it for a moment; it is truly kind and generous in you to lend me the notes;" and she held out her hand to receive them.

But Juliet held them back, saying—"Indeed, Miss Pringle, I fear I ought not to lend you this money. I do not know if I should not be wrong in so doing."

"Do as you like," murmured Miss Pringle; and she sunk apparently fainting on to the floor. Juliet, much distressed, endeavoured to raise her. Miss Pringle suffered herself to be supported, and murmured forth—

"I would not have refused you, Juliet; and after all, the money is only borrowed for a day."

"Take it then," said Juliet; "I am sure I do not wish to be unkind," and she placed the two ten-pound bank notes in the lady's hand.

"Thank you, thank you! dearest Juliet," exclaimed Miss Pringle, springing to her feet; "it shall be returned to you to-morrow; and now let me fly to my poor brother. Oh! that it may not be all too late."

So saying, she ran down stairs, and was out of the house in an instant.

In the mean time Matilda had proceeded on her way to Mrs. Stirling's, but on reaching the house she found that a friend of the Misses Bower had unexpectedly arrived to spend the day, and they wished to decline taking their lesson. The young ladies, who by this time had learned to appreciate the merits of their young mistress, and to take pleasure in her company, asked her to remain with them and join in their amusements. Another time Matilda would willingly have done so, but a certain undefinable feeling respecting Miss Pringle made her think she should be best at home to watch the proceedings of that lady, and she declined the obliging invitation; and after consenting to play one of her favourite pieces of music, she bent her steps homewards. As she walked along, the thought arose in her mind and kept continually recurring to it, that there was no truth in Miss Pringle's history of having come into a fortune: whether it was that she discerned a something or other like acting in her boarder's manner; or that the wording of the letter, or the handwriting were unlawyer-like, she could not tell; but certain it is, she doubted the fact.

"I hope I am not really a suspicious character," said she at last to herself; "I sincerely hope I am not; I will not think any more about the business till I know decidedly one way or the other;" and making a strong effort over herself, she turned her thoughts into another channel.

She decided not to think of her father's letter just

then, happy as it had made her, for fear some association of money mentioned by him should bring back her thoughts to the old train, so she dwelt on the recollection of the ladies she had just left, and was beginning to hum Rhoda Bower's favourite air, in the piece she had played at her request, when she perceived Juliet hastening towards her.

From the moment that the loud banging of the street-door, as it closed on Miss Pringle, had vibrated in her ears, Juliet had experienced a feeling of restlessness which at length increased to positive uneasiness, and she determined to go to her sister and tell her what she had done. She hoped Matilda would approve of her conduct, and say that she had acted not only with kindness but with good judgment. Not expecting that Matilda would have left Mrs. Stirling's so soon, Juliet was agreeably surprised at so speedy a meeting, and hastened forward to relate what had passed between herself and Miss Pringle, first beginning with an account of the lady's generous intentions towards herself, then dilating on the villa near London, and all the other delights which were to spring from her accession to fortune. To all which histories Matilda turned a goodnatured, but at the same time, it must be confessed, an incredulous ear, notwithstanding her determination to cure herself of suspicion; but when Juliet went on to tell of Mr. Jonas being about to be carried off to prison, and his sister's distress and want to borrow money, her attention became fixed, and when at last Juliet told of Miss Pringle's application to herself, and how she had been won upon by pity and self-interest to promise the loan of twenty pounds of the money just received from Mr. Lonsdale; and finally, that, not finding a key to the drawer containing the bank notes, it had been broken open,—Matilda turned pale, and uttering a cry of distress, exclaimed,—

"Oh! Juliet, Juliet! what have you done! Do yo"

really mean to say that you gave Miss Pringle the two ten-pound notes? Oh! what will become of us!"

"If I had not given them," said Juliet, shocked at the distress her sister evinced, "we should have lost all; now we—"

"We have lost all," cried Matilda; "that is a false history, I am certain, about Mr. Jonas. Oh! what shall I do, what shall I do! How could you give credit to such a tale? Stay," continued she, pressing her hand to her forehead; "let me think a moment. I am almost certain, yes, I feel sure, that I saw Miss Pringle not above five minutes ago turn down the road that leads to the railway-station. She was walking very fast; but I am sure it was her by the scarlet shawl: she is, no doubt, on her way to London. I may be in time, I may stop her;" and with all the vigour of early youth, inspired by the desire to achieve some important object, Matilda set off running in the direction of the station, Juliet following close behind. The station was about a quarter of a mile from the spot where the sisters first met. On they went, increasing rather than slackening in their speed, and arrived at their point of destination just as the starting-bell of the London train was sounding. Matilda rushed through the building, flew along the platform, saw the train at a distance before her, and caught sight of Miss Pringle stepping into a carriage. Straining every nerve to reach the train, she got up to it just as one of the men was about to close the last door of a third-class carriage. She laid her hand on the man's arm to stop him, the train was already in motion, and he said,—

"You cannot go."

"I must," said Matilda, and catching hold of the side-handle, she sprang into the carriage, and in another instant was on her way to London.

CHAPTER XIX.

Presence of Mind. A Young Traveller. Timely Assistance. Journey to London. Unlucky Detention. Stopping an Omnibus Passenger. Country Ladies meeting in Town. A Claim. Flight. Pursuit. The Capture. A Confederate. Singular Situation. Attractive Scene. Losing the Right Way. A Guide. House closed. The Use of Reason. Correct Behaviour. Comfortable Quarters. Sense of Protection. Grateful Feelings. Happy Return.

Among other valuable qualities which Mrs. Lonsdale had sought to impress on the minds of her daughters the necessity of possessing, was that of presence of mind. She also desired to give them habits of self-reliance, so that in any case of necessity, where it might happen that they were compelled to act and judge for themselves and by themselves, they would be able to see things in their proper light, and conduct themselves in an unembarrassed manner; and all this she considered might be done without in the least interfering with a truly feminine deportment, or lessening the modest and retiring manner which constitutes so essential a grace in woman's character. Mrs. Lonsdale used to say that it was often very troublesome and inconvenient, where a young woman, either from affectation, or to give herself airs of importance, would not stir out of the house "without a protector," or could not move a short distance from home without deranging the comfort of the whole household by taking away a servant, or calling upon a father or brother to quit their occupations to guard her from — what? phantoms of her own foolish imagination. Mrs. Lonsdale said she was acquainted with a young woman who lost seeing her mother on *her* death-bed, because she could not summon up suf-

ficient resolution to travel the distance of fifty miles in a public conveyance by herself.

When Matilda was a child of eleven years of age, an infirm old lady, a relation of Mr. Lonsdale's, sent to desire that Mrs. Lonsdale, or some one of the family, would go to her immediately, as she wanted a little affair of importance transacted. It so happened that Mr. Lonsdale was absent in London on business, and Mrs. Lonsdale herself was confined to her bed by a severe cold. In this dilemma, Mrs. Lonsdale decided upon sending her eldest daughter to the aid of Mrs. Dalton, her aged relative.

Mrs. Dalton resided at Z——, the county town, which was about nine miles from Riverton. An omnibus ran between the two places three times a week, and by this conveyance the little girl was sent.

During her drive, some persons who got in after the omnibus had proceeded about three miles from Riverton, asked the child a number of questions, which at first she slightly answered or evaded; but perceiving they were determined to persevere in their impertinent curiosity, and not knowing well what to reply, she said distinctly and gravely, addressing the eldest of the party,—

"I wish you would not ask me any more questions you have no right to do so;" after which she took no farther notice of the questioners, nor they of her.

When the omnibus arrived at Z——, it stopped in a large square, where there were a great many carts and vans standing, for it was market-day, and there were a number of persons gathered round the inn where the passengers alighted; but the child got out, paid her money, and walked off in the direction she had been told, without either fear or embarrassment. She remained a week with Mrs. Dalton, and during that time made herself very useful to the old lady, writing letters for her, and going backwards and forwards with messages to her solicitor, and to other friends in the town.

Perhaps on no occasion in Matilda's short but eventful life had presence of mind been more necessary than when she determined to follow Miss Pringle to London. It has been seen that, with all Matilda's benevolence of nature, and desire to hope and think the best of those with whom she associated, she had always entertained strong doubts as to the truth of Miss Pringle's histories of present money embarrassments or of future fortune; and latterly she had been compelled to think that she was an unfeeling and unprincipled woman, who had sought to take advantage of two inexperienced girls living in an unprotected state. Thinking thus of her boarder, it is not surprising that, as soon as she heard Juliet's account of what had passed respecting the twenty pounds, she immediately concluded that Miss Pringle, having obtained possession of this money, intended to abscond, and that she should never see nor hear of her again, nor recover a sixpence of the debt she owed her. This opinion, too, derived confirmation from the circumstance of Miss Pringle having sent off her boxes.

With this impression full on her mind, Matilda's immediate impulse was to stop Miss Pringle's flight, and regain the money, the loss of which would have involved her sisters, brother, and herself, in the greatest difficulties and distress; and for this purpose she pursued her to the railway-station. There, as has been seen, she saw the lady get into a carriage. To speak to her then was impossible, and the only thing to be done was to keep her in sight. Had she once got clear off to London, Matilda knew that all chance of recovering her money would be over. During the journey, which lasted between four and five hours, Matilda was far from being at ease; for though suspecting London to be the lady's ultimate destination, she thought it possible she might quit the train at some of the intermediate stations. In order to be prepared to act in such a case, as soon as Matilda felt the pace

slackening, she placed herself at an open window, and kept her eye directed upon the part of the train which Miss Pringle occupied. The lady kept her place; but at a station where a branch train was joined on, Matilda saw Mr. Jonas get out of one of the carriages, and then return to it, by which the young girl knew that this man was the companion of her late boarder's flight.

At length the journey terminated; but a new difficulty sprung up. Matilda, on being asked for her ticket, and then for money, had neither to give, and she was detained by the authorities. Everybody was getting out of the carriages, hurrying off to different vehicles; and she felt that, after all, she should lose the advantage of her journey. She begged hard to be allowed to pass, promising to pay another time; but it was of no use, she was not suffered to leave the spot. There was a great deal of confusion and bustle and crowding of people; and, under any circumstances, it was difficult to keep a person in view, and Matilda, not being allowed to follow, was in a state of great agitation and distress. She saw Miss Pringle's scarlet shawl mingling in the crowd, and then hastily passing onwards. All, she felt, was over, when as a last hope, she took from her finger a ring of some value, which had been her mamma's, and pressed the man to take it as a pledge of payment.

The man still hesitated, and she was urgently pleading to be allowed to move on, when a well-known voice cried out,—

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, Bright!" exclaimed Matilda, joyously, "is it you?" and in a moment she explained her difficulty.

"All right," cried the man; "run off, Miss Lonsdale; I will settle for you."

Bright, the man who so opportunely arrived at this moment, was a Riverton man, and his wife and children had experienced much kindness from the Lonsdale family. He had just been appointed

to a situation of importance connected with the railway.

Thus happily set at liberty, Matilda hastened forward, looking to the right and left, for the object of her pursuit, when straight before her, but too far off she feared to catch her, she espied Miss Pringle in the act of stepping into an omnibus. Matilda ran on, pushing her way through many impediments of loaded trucks and porters carrying luggage, and reached the omnibus just as it was on the point of starting; she called out to the conductor, who had mounted his step, that she wanted to go.

"Full inside," cried the man; and he made the signal for the driver to go on.

"Stop, stop!" cried Matilda, "I must go outside."

The driver pulled up.

"Is there any gentleman," said the conductor, putting his head into the omnibus, "that would oblige a lady by going outside?"

"I will," said a good-natured lad of fourteen, who had observed Matilda's anxiety to get in; and getting out, the young lady most thankfully took the place of the young gentleman.

Matilda was seated next the door, and it appeared to her that Miss Pringle had not observed her entrance. After proceeding some little way, Matilda drew the attention of the conductor towards herself, and she whispered to him to stop the lady in the scarlet shawl as she got out, for she had money of hers in her possession.

It was near the close of day when the train reached London, and by the time the omnibus arrived at its point of destination, it was dark, and the lamps were lit.

After driving about two miles, in a direction of which Matilda was wholly ignorant, the omnibus stopped, and the company alighted. Matilda, seated next the door, got out first; Miss Pringle was among the last

of the passengers, and as she was descending the steps, the conductor laid hold of her arm, and detaining her, said—

"A lady wants you!"

"Wants me!" said Miss Pringle, looking round, and her eyes falling on Matilda, she started in surprise.

"Yes," said Matilda, coming close up to her; "I want the money you borrowed of my sister; and you must give it up to me this instant."

"Oh! certainly," said Miss Pringle, looking anxiously around as if she was considering the possibility of escape, "certainly; I will give it you, if you do not like to lend it me."

"I must have it; so give it me immediately, if you please, Miss Pringle."

"Then step with me across the road," said Miss Pringle: "we cannot stand here to be run over."

In truth there was some little danger of this, for the conductor, judging that Matilda did not need further assistance, had gone on with the omnibus, which had moved away to make room for other carriages.

The ladies crossed the road, Matilda keeping close to Miss Pringle, and repeating her demand for the return of her money.

"Do not let us draw a mob round us," said the elder lady; "you shall have your money; but let us move on to the next lamp, that I may see to separate your money from my own."

Miss Pringle passed on as she spoke, and by a dexterous manœuvre, contrived so to move, that one or two persons got between her and Matilda, when in an instant, quick as thought, she betook herself to flight. Matilda was taken by surprise, but instantly recovering herself, she followed rapidly after; but Miss Pringle was so much in advance, and was moreover so fleet of foot, that Matilda feared the attempt to catch her was hopeless. Luckily there were but few persons in the street to impede her progress, for

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"I really am ashamed of you, Miss Lonsdale, to conduct yourself in this manner," said Miss Pringle, passionately, yet panting for breath; "what can you mean by such behaviour?"

Matilda was for an instant staggered at such a strange outbreak of anger, but quickly divining that Miss Pringle's motive for so doing was to blind the

Matilda Lonsdale robbed of her money.—P. 300.

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Matilda Lonsdale robbed of her money.—P. 390.

policeman as to the real state of affairs, calmly replied—

"Give me my money."

"I have no money of yours," said the lady with infinite effrontery; "I have only what your sister lent me;" and she made an attempt to escape.

"Come, come," said the policeman, "this will not do; give the young lady her money, or you shall come off with me to the station-house."

This threat was by no means palatable to the lady, for she knew full well that she should be a considerable loser by such an event taking place; for not only should she have to give up the twenty pounds, but if Matilda thought fit to urge her claims, she might draw something very unpleasant upon herself, unless she paid the full amount of all she owed.

Reluctantly therefore, and being convinced she had no chance of escape, she drew forth her purse, and took from it the two ten-pound bank notes, and threw them at, rather than gave them to Matilda, giving vent at the same time to some very ill-natured remarks.

"Have you any farther charge to make against this woman?" inquired the policeman of Matilda.

"She is much in my debt," replied Matilda.

At this moment a man, who proved afterwards to be Mr. Jonas, pushed his way through the crowd that by this time had gathered round the parties, and throwing himself violently against the policeman, staggered, and fell to the ground, as if in a fit. The force with which Jonas came against the policeman threw the latter off his balance, and in endeavouring to save himself from falling, he let go his hold of Miss Pringle, and caught at and overturned a little stand where a woman was selling oysters. The woman, enraged at the disaster, flew at the policeman, when, availing herself of the momentary confusion occasioned by the accident, Miss Pringle pushed her way through the crowd, and once more taking to flight, was out of sight before any one missed her, except Matilda.

Matilda had been pushed aside at the overthrow of the oyster-stand, but keeping her eye on her debtor, she saw the meditated escape, and was springing forward to arrest the progress of the fugitive, when she found herself stopped by the intervention of the man who had fallen in an apparent fit, and whom she then discovered to be Jonas. It was not the intention of Mr. Jonas to draw any particular attention on himself; therefore, when he had attained his object of affording Miss Pringle sufficient time to elude pursuit, he removed from before Matilda, and hastened away from the scene of action with all possible expedition.

Delighted at the fortunate recovery of her twenty pounds, Matilda's mind did not dwell painfully on the escape of Miss Pringle. She reflected that, had her debtor been detained, she herself might have been involved in much trouble, and perhaps considerable expense, and after all she might not have been able to recover any part of her debt, from the lady possibly not having the means of defraying it. Matilda was of opinion that what little money Miss Pringle had been possessed of, together with her plate, was now transferred to the keeping of Mr. Jonas.

Gradually recovering from the agitation and excitement she had undergone, Matilda began to reflect upon the peculiar situation in which she found herself placed. She was a total stranger to London, never having been there before; she had no idea of the locality in which she then was, and she did not even know what was the hour. She turned to the policeman to seek information on these points, and also to thank him for the assistance he had lent her; but he was engaged in such warm debate with the woman whose property he had accidentally injured, that he paid her no attention; and seeing a coloured lamp before a door, a little further on, she bent her steps in that direction, and entered a chymist's shop. Here she asked permission of the boy in attendance to rest a few minutes, not that she felt

tired, but she wished to place the bank notes which she still held in her hand in a place of security somewhere about her person. When she had accomplished this object, she inquired of the shop-lad how far she was from the South-western terminus, and on being told, and observing the hour of the evening by the chymist's clock, she decided that it would be too late to return to Riverton that night, as she was aware that no train by which she could travel would be going to that place after the hour at which she could possibly hope to reach the terminus. It was therefore necessary that she should pass the night in London; and remembering that her mamma used to deal with a haberdasher in Oxford-street, and that she had often heard her speak in terms of warm commendation of the high respectability of the firm, she determined that she would proceed there, and request to be accommodated with a bed for the night; so, asking the boy to direct her which way to take, she set forth on her walk in good spirits, and soon reached one of the busiest parts of the metropolis. The bright lights of the streets, the gay appearance of the shops, the incessant rattle of carriages, and the animated demeanour of the passers-by, amused her very much, and she thought London must be a very pleasant place to live in. Every now and then her eye was caught by some beautiful engraving, or some splendid-looking books, or brilliant jewellery, or gay dresses; and she paused in admiration to gaze in at the shop-windows, quite forgetful of everything but the charming novelty of the scene before her. After a time she found herself quitting these gay regions, and entering upon quite a different part of the town; passing on, as she thought, the way she had been directed, she found herself involved in a labyrinth of streets, from which she seemed unable to extricate herself; for, after a great deal of fast walking, she found herself back again in precisely the same spot from which she had started half an hour before. Matilda had been

told by the chymist's boy to take the fifth turning to the right, then the third to the left, and then the second to the right again, and that would bring her into the direction of Oxford-street, and then she had better inquire again. Matilda feared that she had not been sufficiently attentive to the direction that had been given her, and that, intent on her amusement, she had turned to the left, when she ought to have turned to the right, and to the right when the left would have been her proper road. Quite confused, she thought she had better address herself to some of the persons she met, and beg to be put in the way for Oxford-street. The first person she inquired of, told her she was coming away from it, and that it was at least a mile off. Turning round, she walked on some way, but fearing that she might again go wrong, she asked a young girl who passed her with a parcel in her hand, if she was in the right way for Oxford-street. The girl replied that she was, and on asking what part of the street Matilda wanted, and being answered that it was near Newman-street, she said she was going close by there herself, and would show her the way.

This was a lucky chance Matilda considered, and she walked briskly on beside her companion, wondering every now and then how the girl contrived to thread her way through so many streets that looked so very much alike, without appearing in the slightest degree embarrassed, or once stopping to read their names. Arrived at the end of Newman-street, Matilda's conductor left her, but she had no difficulty in finding the house she wanted,—Messrs. T. and K., No. —, Oxford-street. But here a sad disappointment awaited her: the hour of business was past and the shop was closed, and she knew no way of making her presence known. For a few minutes the poor girl felt quite disheartened, but calling to mind another tradesman in the neighbourhood of Soho-square, with whom her parents used to deal, she determined to proceed there

on the same errand. Fortunately, she remembered to have heard that Soho-square was not far from Oxford-street, and she resolved to go there. Most of the shops were now shut, but at a baker's which was still open, she inquired the way and received a plain direction to the street she wanted; but ill luck here again attended her, for not only was the shop she went in search of closed, but a new name attested that it had changed proprietors. In this dilemma she thought of a woman who had, in the spring, been staying some time in a cottage close to Mr. Stirling's; she had formerly been nurse in Mr. Stirling's family, and was down a few weeks in the country for change of air. Matilda knew the address of this woman, and also knowing her to be very respectable, she reflected that the best thing she could now do was to apply to her to be received for the night. With this intention Matilda turned her steps again in the direction of Oxford-street, but unluckily taking one wrong turning she again lost her way; and moreover, she felt convinced, that so new and strange were the places to her, that she should do so again and again. Every shop now appeared closed, and as she wandered on she began to fear that she should draw attention to her unprotected state.

What did Matilda do under these circumstances? Did she hurry to and fro in an excited way? Did she burst into tears, and by her cries or restless manner, draw upon her the notice she feared to attract?

No; Matilda did neither the one thing nor the other. She called up her reasoning powers, and reflected calmly on her situation. First of all she asked herself this question; "While I conduct myself in a quiet and orderly manner, what have I to fear? On all sides I see girls, as young or younger than myself, out in the streets by themselves, either carrying home work, or with a jug in their hands going for beer, or passing steadily along with business-like countenances, on their way to the houses where they

live. And should I really see coming forward any person whom I might imagine likely to molest me, cannot I step to the doors on either side, and just pull the bell, or knock? Yes," said she, finally, "as long as I retain my presence of mind, and act in a steady composed manner, I have nothing really to fear."

While thus reasoning with herself, Matilda had ceased to walk about, and had stationed herself on the flagstone before a respectable-looking house, determining to remain there till some one should pass, who could again guide her into one of the main streets. While thus waiting, she decided that she would give up further search for friendly accommodation, and betake herself to a hotel; she knew this would be expensive, and she could ill afford the money; but the sense of propriety, which always controls the actions of properly educated girls, made her feel that it would not be right for her longer to remain out alone.

Soon after coming to this resolution, a respectable man and woman, accompanied by two or three neatly-dressed children, passed close by her, and stepping forward, she asked the woman if she could oblige her by directing her to a "family hotel."

The woman thus addressed, replied, that there was one close by, where the people were civil, and the charges moderate, and offered to conduct Matilda to it, saying, she should pass it in her way home.

Matilda gladly accepted the offer, and in a very few minutes found herself lodged for the night in a comfortable apartment, in a quiet and respectable inn.

Her wanderings thus happily terminated, a sense of hunger, which had hitherto been kept in abeyance by the strange events and new scenes in which she had been engaged, now began to make itself pressingly felt. She knew too much of the high charges at hotels, to allow of her thinking, even for a mo-

ment, of ordering anything for supper; and she was making up her mind to do without food, when she remembered a packet of cakes which Alice Bower had put up for her to take home,—they being some of her own manufacturing. Having enjoyed this timely refreshment, she sat for a short time revolving in her mind the circumstances of the eventful day, and her heart overflowed with thankfulness for the Fatherly Providence that had been over her, guiding, protecting, and sustaining her amidst scenes and events of great excitement, and not wholly unattended with a degree of peril.

With all the powers of her mind engaged in the occupation, she knelt and offered up her fervent prayers and thanksgiving to God, for all His mercies and loving-kindness vouchsafed towards her the day past.

No particular event attended the remainder of Matilda's stay in London; she paid for her accommodation at the hotel, and by the advice of the mistress went in an omnibus to the terminus; paid for her excursion, per train, of the previous and the present day, and arrived at Riverton safe and well.

Juliet, accompanied by Kate and by Rupert, when his school hours allowed of it, had been to the station every time a London train was to arrive, and her joy, when she saw her sister step from one of the carriages, was unbounded. She had had a thousand undefinable fears for her sister's safety; and when she saw her return, looking well and happy, she could hardly restrain a cry of joy.

Matilda lost no time in telling the successful result of her journey; and Juliet, when her emotions of joy were sufficiently under control, related the history of her mental sufferings after her sister's departure, and with tears of sincere repentance, she acknowledged her folly, and declared her determination to act for the future with more deliberation and sounder judgment

As to the two younger children, they were in the happiest state possible; their kind good sister, Matilda, was returned to them, and they had got rid for ever of Miss Pringle,—" their evil genius," as Rupert called her.

CHAPTER XX.

Pleasant Months. An Amiable Girl. Lasting Impressions. Improvement in Character. A Singing Class. Giving up a Home. Making the Best of what cannot be helped. Pressing for the Payment of Debts. Money Embarrassments. Striving to procure a Maintenance. A Reward for Good Conduct. Affairs grow worse and worse. Application to a Friend. An opportune Gift. Going out as a Companion. "Three Crabbed Old Souls." Going to a School as a Teacher of Singing, Companion's Occupations. Exercise of Patience. Domestic Tyrants.

Two or three months succeeding the events related in the last chapter glided calmly and pleasantly away with the young Lonsdales, the only drawback to their happiness being the not hearing anything more from their father, and the not having it in their power to communicate with him, owing to being unacquainted with his address.

With money enough to supply the moderate wants of the family, and inexpressibly relieved to have got rid of an unprincipled and most unpleasant inmate, Matilda's spirits revived, her health recovered its usual tone, and there were times when she was gay and lively, as in the days of her early childhood.

Matilda was eminently fitted to make home comfortable and pleasant. Ever desirous to promote the ease and happiness of those around her, she was cheerful, obliging, and forbearing. At the same time, she was always ready, at the sacrifice of her own enjoyment, to listen to the woes of others, to soothe, to comfort, and to do all in her power to alleviate their distress.

The younger children loved her with all their hearts, and her appearance was always hailed by them with pleasure. If she was long away from them, they could not rest without coming to seek for her. The kindness of her

manner, even when she had to reprove, won their regard, and the unvarying sweetness of her temper, together with her occasional lively sallies and entertaining conversation, made them delight to be in her company.

The unhappiness that Juliet had drawn upon herself, by her indiscretion in listening to and trusting Miss Pringle, together with some excellent counsel from Mrs. Rushton, had produced a more permanent impression on the mind of the volatile girl than usual; and her chief happiness now consisted in the society of her sister. Matilda's mental powers were in advance of her years; and Juliet found, in reading and conversing with her sister, that her own tastes were raised, and she lost the love of gossip, and ceased to delight in frivolous conversation.

Both sisters were fond of society, and were glad to visit again at the houses of friends from which they had lately been much excluded on account of their unpleasant boarder. These girls were fitted to give pleasure by their company; they were sensible and well-informed, and, through constant attention to the subject, their manners were graceful and lady-like: and their accomplishments had been so carefully cultivated, that they were much above par. In music, indeed, few girls of their age could surpass them; nature and art had both assisted largely to cause them to excel.

Their superior music seemed to inspire many of their acquaintance with a wish to be as clever, and Juliet proposed forming a singing-class among her young friends.

It appeared to her that she should find it very amusing, and that after a time she should derive a great deal of pleasure from the performance of chants and anthems, together with glees and madrigals. Matilda, as the best or most scientific musician, was to preside at the pianoforte till the singers were capable of doing without instrumental assistance, and then she was to be vocal leader.

Juliet's proposal was listened to with pleasure, and

the party formed. The Grahams, Rose Vernon, the Bowers, and one or two other girls, came regularly twice a week to the Lonsdales to practise.

As all the party were diligent and really desirous to improve, progress was soon made, and a great deal of pleasure was afforded to all the parties concerned. Juliet especially was pleased; and she often said to Matilda that she could not now understand how it was that she had ever taken pleasure in the society of such contemptible persons as Miss Eliza Moore and Miss Priscilla Pringle.

The winter passed, and the spring was advancing, without any fresh letter, or any further supply of money, arriving from Mr. Lonsdale.

The time, too, was now come for giving up the house, and the young Lonsdales would soon be without a place in which to shelter themselves. Enough money still remained to pay the rent, and a little besides for present exigencies. The best thing to be done, in the opinion of the elder girls, was to take two small rooms in the town, and remove there, till they either heard from their father, or had settled some means by which they could support themselves and the children.

Mr. Stirling kindly offered to put all the furniture into a dry loft on his premises, and sent men who were at work for him, together with a waggon, to move it, thus relieving Matilda from great perplexity, and saving her expense.

The leaving the house and garden, with all their dear and tender associations, was a most painful thing, and previous to the final departure many a heartache was felt, and many a tear shed by the juvenile party. Matilda, in her capacity of general comforter, said that they must not mind the change as long as they were all preserved to each other, and observed how trifling a grief was that they now felt compared to what it might have been had any of them been separated by death.

"We are all alive and well," said she, cheerfully,

"have the perfect use of our faculties, and the world all before us in which to gain a living."

Matilda, too, read herself a little moral when she went to pack up the different articles in her father's room.

"How angry and distressed I was," said she to herself, "at Miss Pringle getting into this room and destroying the arrangements I had made for the reception of my father. He has not been, and I am now removing everything myself. Had I known how it was to be, I might have spared myself much vexation. Is not this a lesson to be remembered through life? and ought it not to teach me to think lightly of every distress and annoyance that does not arise from improper conduct of my own?"

It was not a very easy matter to find accommodation for the young party in so small a town as Riverton. Both Matilda and Juliet looked about, and at last decided to take two small rooms on the ground-floor, at the house of a little tradesperson's, in the middle of the town. The apartments were clean and airy, and the aspect somewhat cheerful. At first it was feared that the pianoforte could not be got in; but happily this was at last accomplished, and with portfolios, books, and a few other favourite articles, imparted an air of comfort to the sitting-room. The three girls were to occupy the inner room, and a bed was arranged every night in the parlour for Rupert.

In all her troubles and difficulties, it was a consolation to Matilda that she was able to pay the rent of the house, and also that her father on his return, when that happy moment should arrive, would find all his valuables carefully preserved for him.

Ever since Matilda heard of the debts that had been incurred in her name by her worthless boarder, she determined never to rest till, by some means or other, they were defrayed; and with this laudable resolution full in her mind, she for a long time had been making little savings from her narrow means. But when she

found the incessant calls that were made upon her scanty purse, by weekly payments for her apartments, common prudence compelled her to reserve these little savings for the urgent necessities of the family.

Every week as it passed increased her uneasiness, for her funds were nearly exhausted, and, added to the anxiety of not knowing how to provide for the future, the woman who had provided Miss Pringle with poultry, and one or two others, sent their bills in more than once, and at last became clamorous for their money. The distress of Matilda was very great; night after night she lay awake thinking over every possible scheme by which to raise money to pay these debts which painfully burdened her mind, and also to furnish the means of living for herself, and brother and sisters. She talked daily, almost hourly, to Juliet on the subject; and both sisters suggested one plan, and then another, by which to support themselves, but not one of them was feasible or would answer the purpose.

Once or twice, though the money it cost was a severe loss, they put an advertisement into the county newspaper for situations as governesses, but no reply was elicited. At one time they thought of keeping a day-school, but this was all beaten ground, for, small as the place was, there were already many schools of every description. They would have taken in needlework, mechanical as was the occupation, if there had been a chance of procuring it, but a few long-established semstresses and the school children did all the work that the ladies in the place required.

Matilda and Juliet sent a few of their drawings, made expressly for the occasion, to a print-seller's at Z— to sell on commission, but they were returned after a time faded and crumpled as unsaleable articles.

Juliet suggested borrowing money of some of their friends, but this was so repugnant to all Matilda's notions of what was right, that she would not do it.

"It is a sad thing," Juliet would often say, "that girls have so little the power of earning money. As regards ourselves, our minds are cultivated, we have read a great deal, are competent to teach the modern languages, and have had great practice in music, and not a little in drawing; but even if we were so fortunate as to find situations as governesses, we should probably not receive so much payment as an upper servant in a gentleman's family."

It appeared that no assistance from any quarter was likely to come to these distressed girls; for Matilda, after many struggles with herself on the necessity of overcoming her disinclination to do so, applied to Mrs. Stanley and to Mrs. Stirling, to know if they could assist Juliet and herself in procuring any situation in which they could find a maintenance. Mrs. Stanley immediately wrote to several of her acquaintances on the subject, but no good resulted from her endeavours to serve her young friends. Mrs. Stirling did the same, with the like ill-success; but as regarded the latter lady, a circumstance arose which was as welcome as it was unexpected, namely, Mr. Stirling receiving Rupert as a boarder in his school without the payment of any salary.

So impressed were both Mr. and Mrs. Stirling with Matilda's good and amiable qualities, and so much indebted did they consider themselves to her for the change she had wrought in the character and manners of Rhoda and Alice, together with the surprising improvement she had caused them to make in music, that they considered it would be quite as much a duty as a pleasure to relieve their young friend of the charge of supporting her brother.

This was some relief to Matilda in a pecuniary way; and the satisfaction she felt at having Rupert well educated and well taken care of was as cheering in the midst of her troubles, as a beam of sunshine in a cloudy day. Rupert, though grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Stirling for their kindness, and happy to ease Matilda

in a pecuniary way, was very sorry to leave his home, and he thought in a number of respects his sisters would hardly know how to do without him. They all felt his absence very much, and Matilda often missed a number of kind little offices he used to perform for her.

But soon everything assumed so dark a hue in the lives of the girls, that all pleasure and comfort was not even thought of. They began to lose their health and strength, from privations and uneasiness of mind; when, as a last resource, Matilda determined to go to Mr. Burke and consult him on the state of her affairs. She had seen but little of him since the departure of Miss Pringle, but on learning the history of the lady's flight, he had said he would willingly make inquiries after her, and endeavour to recover the money she owed, if there was the least probability of success, but of that he entertained not the least hope.

Mr. Burke was not at home when Matilda went to his house, but she left a note, requesting him to favour her with a call as soon as he conveniently could.

The good gentleman lost no time in attending to Matilda's summons, but to judge from his air and manner, it might have been thought that he would have been long before he performed anything so apparently disagreeable as paying this visit seemed to him. He entered the room with an expression of countenance so frigid and ill-tempered that it cast a chill over both the girls. Sitting down, he looked round with a scowl, and said, addressing Matilda—

"What a close disagreeable little place you have poked yourself into; what on earth made you come here?"

"Inferior and unpleasant as this situation may appear to you," replied Matilda, "I should be very glad to keep it; but I have no longer the means of paying for apartments, my money is all gone, and my

sister and I must starve or go to service. We are fitted by education," continued she diffidently, while her voice faltered, "for something better if we could find it. You once most kindly assisted us,—can you advise us now?"

During this little speech of Matilda's a revolution had passed over the countenance of her hearer, the stern expression of his features relaxed, and gave way to a look of pity and benevolence. He, however, said nothing, but placing his hands on the top of his walking-stick, leant his chin on them, and remained some minutes apparently lost in thought. He then rose, and was abruptly quitting the room, when he caught a book out of Kate's hand, who was sitting learning her lesson near the door, and exclaimed—

"What do you have such an ugly book as this for, child? Here, take this, and buy a better, directly;" so saying, he drew a sovereign from his waistcoat pocket, slipped it between the leaves of the book, returned it to the little girl, and left the room.

Seldom had a small aid of this kind come more opportunely, but Matilda's proper spirit of independence forbid her looking upon this money as a gift, and it was registered in her mind as one of the first debts she should be desirous of paying.

Early on the following morning Mr. Burke made his appearance again at the Lonsdales' humble residence.

"You think me an odd fellow, I have little doubt," said he, seating himself opposite to Matilda, "but I could say nothing of myself, yesterday; I was obliged to inquire at home first. You know my wife, I think?"

Matilda replied that she had formerly occasionally seen Mrs. Burke, but she understood that of late she was confined a good deal to the house by illness.

"Just so," replied Mr. Burke, "and she has recently taken it into her head that she should like some

young woman to live with her by way of companion. Now, you are a good deal too young for the situation, still I think you are a steady sort of girl, and would do. You can read out, I suppose, tolerably well; no particular tone or whine, eh?"

Matilda could hardly forbear a smile at the style of this question; but replied gravely that she hoped she was pretty free from these faults.

"Not very monotonous either, I hope," continued Mr. Burke; "I hate one sing-song tone; I shall be by at the readings myself, *if* I can bear to listen to you; my eyes are getting very weak, almost worn out, just like the rest of me."

Matilda said that she should be happy to do all in her power to contribute to the comfort of those she lived with.

"Well, if you come to us," continued Mr. Burke, "and I suppose you are not much in a state to choose your situation, that will be a part of your duty. I cannot very well tell what else you will have to do. You will have to be all day long with my wife, attend to what she wants, and listen to all her complaints. Talking of her illness forms a great part of Mrs. Burke's employment. She and my sister have a regular set-to sometimes, and talk over their ailments till they fairly tire each other out.

"Do you know my sister? she lives with us; queer temper—a Burke all over, but you need have nothing to do with her. Well, do you choose to come? If you do, you shall have twenty pounds a year, paid quarterly."

Matilda said she should be very glad to accept of the situation, and thanked Mr. Burke for his kindness in assisting her.

"I do not think, my poor girl," said he, rising to depart, "you will have much to thank me for; we are three crabbed old souls, and you will, I fear, have much to put up with."

An early day was then fixed for Matilda's entering

on her new career, and the gentleman took his leave.

The prospect before her did not seem very inviting, but Matilda felt most thankful to be relieved from immediate and pressing distress, both for herself and sisters, for whose maintenance her salary would provide.

But, singular enough, that very same day, Juliet was also put in a way of maintaining herself. In the evening, when the girls were very busily talking over their future plans, Mrs. Stirling arrived. She came as a messenger from Miss Wright. This lady was in great want of some one to teach singing in her school.

Major Bloxam, who had heard Juliet's singing class, was, with two or three other parents who had daughters at Miss Wright's school, very desirous that a master should be engaged to instruct the girls in part singing. Miss Wright, in consequence, engaged a teacher from Z——; but he, not conducting himself in a satisfactory manner, was dismissed, and the mistress of the establishment was at a great loss to find some one to supply his place. Mrs. Stirling proposed Miss Lonsdale, or her sister, as being very capable of affording the required instruction.

Miss Wright, who, from her own knowledge, and from what she had heard others say, was aware of the competency of these girls to fill the office, said that she should be happy to secure the services of the elder sister.

Finding Matilda had just accepted a situation elsewhere, Mrs. Stirling returned to Miss Wright, and proposed Juliet. Some little difficulty arose in negociating the business for this sister. The unfortunate transaction respecting Miss Bell's letters, in which Juliet had borne a part, was still remembered by the schoolmistress; but at last, through the representations and persuasions of Mrs. Stirling, Miss Wright's objections were overcome, and it was settled that Juliet should be a resident in the house, teach singing, and make herself useful in other respects, with-

out any salary for the first six months. In return for her singing lessons, she was to derive some benefit from one or two of the masters who attended at the school.

Juliet, like Matilda, was in no state to choose her situation, or make terms; therefore, in a few days from the present time, she found herself installed as singing mistress at "Miss Wright's establishment for young ladies."

Kate, after much deliberation on the subject, was placed under the care of Mrs. Rushton. Matilda looked forward with hope to the future, when she should be able to do better for her dear little sister. In the meantime she knew the child would be taken the greatest care of, and kept from all bad example, and made to attend to her lessons, Ann being very capable of superintending the plain education of one so young. The child's maintenance was to be paid for out of Matilda's salary.

Matilda entered upon her new mode of life with a fixed determination to do her duty, and a sincere hope that she should give satisfaction to those with whom she lived. But the poor girl little knew what it was she had undertaken.

Mrs. Burke's was naturally a very indifferent temper, and now that she was a considerable sufferer from ill-health, she considered herself a privileged person to make herself and every one who came near her as uncomfortable as possible. Nothing ever seemed to please her, nothing was ever done to her satisfaction, and she kept up an incessant grumble and worry from morning till night. Matilda's sweet temper, gentleness, and forbearance, by no means exempted her from the common lot; on the contrary, the patience with which she bore her share of the burden seemed a reason for laying more upon her. But Mrs. Burke by no means formed the only part of Matilda's trials. Miss Burke, from the first moment the young girl entered the house, appeared to take a dislike to her; and endless were the petty annoyances that this cross-

grained old lady caused "the companion." Whatever Matilda was about, or however she was employed, she was always exposed to something unpleasant from this lady. If she was in active attendance upon the invalid, Miss Burke would find fault with her manner of performing the different offices required of her. She put the shawl on wrong; she set the footstool in an improper place; she handed the broth too hot, or too cold; she rustled the newspaper; read too low, or too loud; banged the door when she shut it, or crept in like an eavesdropper, intent on learning secrets she had no right to know. If Matilda sat down to work, Miss Burke immediately wanted her place; if she took up a book, and seemed interested in its perusal, it was the volume Miss Burke was just going to read. These and many other petty annoyances the lady constantly practised on the patient, unresisting girl. Matilda often repeated to herself that they were not misfortunes, but they were very irksome, and served to rob life of much comfort.

With Mr. Burke she did not get on much better than with the ladies. He was a man who was capable of assisting in a large cause when it came plainly and forcibly before his eyes; but of the little details, the trifling actions that go so great a way in making up the sum of hourly and daily comfort, he seemed to have a very imperfect notion. He would sit and wrangle, and dispute over some frivolous point with his wife and sister, by the hour together, and could Matilda have been amused on such occasions, she would have been entertained to see how a matter so insignificant in itself would give rise to three separate ways of regarding it, and each maintained with a tenacity that could only be supposed to be called forth on some vital point or other.

When Matilda first heard that she was to be engaged in reading, she looked forward to this occupation as one of the pleasantest parts of her duty; but even here disappointment often met her. The

ladies and gentleman never could agree as to the sort of book each wished to have read. Matilda's first essay in this line was a work on political economy; a subject possessing sufficient interest, even for a girl of her age; but the present volume was written in so dry a manner, and in so obscure a style, that in her heart she agreed with the ladies in thinking that Mr. Burke's selection of a book for the afternoon's entertainment was not a very happy one. He persisted, however, in carrying his point for a time, and Matilda read on; at least she tried to do so, but at every pause, either for breath, or to make the sense clear, the ladies, first one and then the other, or both together, chimed in with a variety of discourteous observations, both as regarded the author and the chooser of the book.

After a time a volume of travels was proposed by Miss Burke, and Matilda had just got interested in the history of a newly-discovered country, when the invalid lady interrupted to know "who cared about hearing of such places and people?" and desired Matilda to leave off directly: the gentleman and the other lady ordered her to go on. The reader was quite at a loss how to act, when in a momentary silence, she said, glancing her eye down the page,

"I think, Mrs. Burke, here is a description of the manners and customs of these people that will amuse you; shall I go on?"

No opposition being offered, Matilda proceeded with a few more pages, when the mistress of the house again stopping her, declared so positively that there should be no more of that stupid book read, that Matilda closed the volume, and went in search of a book of poems, which Mrs. Burke desired her to fetch directly. Selecting a poem according to the lady's taste, Matilda was proceeding with its perusal, when Mr. Burke called out in a loud voice,

"Leave off this moment! I cannot stand it; you read poetry horribly! Up and down, sing song;

there you go, without the least change in your voice, or variety of cadence!—why it is enough to drive the cat mad to hear you! at any rate it does me, and you shall not read another line."

Matilda was very much disconcerted—but as she thought there was some truth in what Mr. Burke said as regarded her reading poetry, she wisely determined to profit by his remarks, and took an opportunity when he chanced to be in a more amiable mood than the present, of asking him to give her a few lessons in elocution.

This the gentleman promised to do, and about three times in the course of as many months Matilda found an opportunity of availing herself of his instructions. Rare as these occasions were, Matilda turned them to good account; for when in bed at night, or at those times when by chance she got a turn alone in the garden, she practised herself in all she had been taught, by repeating passages of poetry.

Mr. Burke disliked visiting; Mrs. Burke was too great an invalid to allow of her entering into society, and Miss Burke was so rheumatic that she preferred staying at home. Still there was a constant desire among the party for something or somebody to enliven them, and help pass away many weary hours; and regret was frequently expressed that a certain Mr. Spratt had left the neighbourhood, as they could never now have a rubber at whist. One wet evening, when no particular dispute had been got up between the three relations, and the two ladies had positively tired themselves by discussions on their several complaints, and were feeling all the lassitude of unemployed and ill-regulated minds, Mrs. Burke said in a very peevish tone to Matilda,

"I wish you were of some use, Miss Lonsdale! Can you do nothing to furnish a little amusement this dull evening? I wish you could play at whist."

"Perhaps she can," said Mr. Burke, brightening at the thought; "did you ever play?"

Matilda, who had no fondness for cards, replied that she had never played since she was eleven years old, and that only for a week when she was on a visit to an old relative at Z———, who had taught her the game to make up one when a friend was absent.

"You know kings from queens, and hearts from clubs, I suppose," said Mr. Burke, and on Matilda replying that her knowledge extended so far, the card-table was rung for, and the party seated themselves at it, Mr. Burke taking Matilda for his partner, the ladies declaring "that she should not play with either of them."

Matilda remembered enough of the game to enable her to follow suit, and to prevent her trumping her partner's ace the first round, or committing any egregious blunders of that kind; but her play, as it went on, elicited many expressions of surprise and displeasure from her partner; and when the first game was ended, he fixed a pair of angry eyes on her, and said,—

"You play shockingly! What could make you play your king second hand, when Mrs. Burke led off the diamonds? and why did you play your thirteenth spade before the trumps were out? and why did you persist in going on with your trumps, when my sister had renounced? and what on earth could induce you to finesse your knave in the lead of hearts when the adversaries were at nine, and you sat with ace king in your hand? Why, ma'am, it was presenting them with the trick—absolutely giving them the game! It is downright folly to play so; an infant would know better."

Perhaps so, thought Matilda, if it had been taught the game; but she said nothing, and the rubber proceeded; but on an unfortunate revoke occurring on her part, Mr. Burke exploded in such a violent fit of anger, that Matilda, who had been for some time making an effort over herself to control a strong inclination she had to cry, burst into tears, and

rising from the table, begged to be excused from playing any more, saying she knew nothing of the game.

"What a great baby!" exclaimed Miss Burke.

"How very pettish!" muttered the invalid.

But Mr. Burke, struck with the truth of Matilda's remark, that she did not know the game, held out his hand to her, and bidding her not mind what he had said, promised to give her the next morning a treatise on whist, that she might study it; adding—

"You are not a stupid girl, and can learn by that not to spoil other people's play,—and avoid getting scolded yourself."

As Matilda saw that she must play, she did not fail to study the "Manual of the beautiful and scientific game of whist;" and in time she became a tolerably good player. But the worst part of improving her knowledge was, that it involved her being obliged to sit down, night after night, to cards, and to witness the irritation of temper and angry feeling that constantly arose among the party when any mistakes were made, or the play was contrary to each other's judgment. Matilda made the reflection, as many have done before, that it is very absurd, when the occupation is professedly *play* and *amusement*, to allow angry passions to arise, and destroy everything like pleasure.

Matilda did not regret that she had acquired a knowledge of whist, for she considered that there might be times when she would be glad to help pass away, by a little pleasant excitement, an hour or two of some poor souls' time, when, weary with pain and lassitude, they were unable to talk or to read.

As regarded herself, irksome as was the constant playing, she endeavoured to turn the task to some account; and as an exercise of memory, she acquired the habit of recollecting every card, down even to twos and threes; and as she said to herself, "At any

rate I can exercise myself in patience, by doing that for which I have no taste."

Summer came, and during the fine weather and long days, Matilda was released from her attendance at the card-table; but in other respects her time passed in the same dull, monotonous, and irksome manner as ever.

She suffered no actual hardships certainly; still, no slave nor closely-confined prisoner could have enjoyed less independence or liberty of action. Condemned from morning till night to listen to peevish wailings, to the performance of vexatious trifles, contradicted, blamed, scolded, she seemed almost to lose her own identity in executing the capricious orders, and obeying the stern commands of the domestic tyrants with whom she lived.

Matilda's was a wearying and painful existence, but there was no escaping from it; she had no means of providing herself with anything better. In her distress of mind she would often reflect whether all the days of her youth were to pass thus. Then she would think of her father, and picture to herself his return, her going to live with him, the having assembled round her the sister who was always her favourite friend and companion; her well-disposed manly brother, and her own little tender-hearted Kate. All the dear delights of home, the pleasing duties, the exercise of the best affections, the peace and happiness to be found there, would rise to her imagination, till the contrast with her present life would be almost more painful than she could bear.

But amidst all her troubles, Matilda had one unfailing source of consolation, she had one Friend to whom she could tell out all the sorrows of her aching heart; one whose ear she knew was ever open to her, whose eye ever beheld her, who knew all her griefs and trials, and whom she felt sure thought her present life the best for her, or else He would not have

permitted it to be. With faith, and hope, and trust, she would pray for patience and sufficient strength to bear unmurmuring her lot; even to be cheerful under it, and to look forward with hope to something better, if not in this world, in the world to come.

CHAPTER XXI.

Teaching Music. Impatience. Reproof. False Accusations. The Value of a Good Character. Midsummer Holidays. Contrast in Feeling and in Situation. Singing and Playing to an Invalid. Daily Reading of the Holy Scriptures. Inquiry after a Father. "A thorough Good Girl." Change of Occupation. Bad News. Illness. A Younger Sister. Suspense. Happy Day. Going back to the School. Unsuccessful Application. Anxiety of Mind. Hope almost Lost. A Conversation. Conclusion.

Our history must now return to the other sister, whom we left just appointed to the office of singing mistress at Miss Wright's school. The first thing that struck Juliet in her new career was the truth of an observation she had once made—namely, the difference there is in cultivating music as an amusement, from following it as a profession. Instead of now resorting to music as an agreeable relaxation, or pursuing it when she was in the humour for "sweet sounds," it was become the important business of her life, and must be followed with unremitting attention and steadiness. Instead of superintending the practice of well-bred and intelligent young ladies as formerly, when she, with her sister and juvenile friends, had formed a singing class for their amusement, she had now to encounter dullness, obstinacy, stupidity, and ill-temper. A few among her pupils formed an exception, and by perseverance many others were brought at the end of a few months to sing tolerably well. But Juliet's patience was often severely taxed and her temper tried, when on any public exhibition, some girl on whom she had bestowed more than common labour, would spoil the effect of a favourite round or madrigal by singing half a note too sharp or too low.

Once, when a great many of the parents of the young ladies were arrived to hear the performance, Juliet was so provoked with one of her pupils for committing a fault of this kind, that she ordered her before all the assembled company to quit the class and sit down.

Miss Wright was much annoyed at this ill-timed display of authority, and told Juliet afterwards that it had nearly cost her a pupil, the parents were so angry at this public exposure of their daughter.

"The folly of the parents," Miss Wright said, "was nothing to the purpose; but that the youthful singing mistress must be more discreet for the future." Juliet promised amendment; but teaching music, where the ear of the instructor is very sensitive, is often an irksome task; and Juliet, who was not sufficiently exercised in the Christian virtue of patience, often gave way to irritation, and even anger during her lessons, which drew upon her frequent reproofs from the lady at the head of the establishment.

Juliet was discontented with her lot, and was often very unhappy; but a circumstance occurred towards the end of the first half year, that caused her to reflect that, unpleasant as she considered her situation, it could become much more so.

Another case of deceit occurred in the school, which, though not of so flagrant a kind as that relating to Miss Bell, was sufficient to cause Miss Wright much annoyance, and all the parties engaged in it a great deal of unhappiness. Juliet was suspected of being concerned in the affair, and though perfectly innocent, there were suspicious circumstances attached to her from which she found it impossible to clear herself. And here it was that Juliet was made painfully sensible of the value of character; she had deceived before, and her word was not enough to free her from suspicion now. She assured Miss Wright that she had borne no part in the present discreditable transaction; but though civilly listened to, Juliet

perceived that doubt still attached to her, and, what was more annoying than anything else, was, that she found herself for the future carefully watched, and treated altogether as a person in whom no confidence could be placed.

Juliet's character had undergone a great change for the better since the time when she was intimate with Miss Moore. She had learned to set a due value upon candour, openness, and integrity. She was now fully sensible of the moral excellence of these virtues, and the higher motive of religious duty caused her to shrink with abhorrence from the slightest approach to dissimulation or falsehood.

With feelings such as these it was doubly painful to be suspected of acting with slyness and deceit herself, or of sanctioning those base qualities in others.

Juliet passed the midsummer holidays at the school: she had no home to go to, and she was of sufficient use to make Miss Wright wish to retain her in her service.

Lessons and other school duties were all over, and Juliet was at liberty to employ herself as she liked. She could read for hours, she could play, draw, or work, as the fancy took her. She could stroll all day in the garden, or if she pleased she could join her friends, the Grahams, and others in their walks, or she could visit Broomheath and see Ann, and attend to her little sister. In her liberty of action her situation formed a striking contrast to that of Matilda. Still the elder sister enjoyed a freedom to which the younger was a stranger.

Juliet was a victim to the worst kind of slavery, that of a shackled and embarrassed mind. She was an object of mistrust and suspicion to her employer, and her former bad conduct prevented the possibility of her being freed from the charges that were laid to her.

Hardly any intercourse subsisted between the two

elder Lonsdales. Matilda had, early on her arrival at Mrs. Burke's, been given to understand that she could neither go out nor receive visitors. An occasional letter was all that now remained to tell these attached sisters of the employments, the sufferings, and the feelings of each other. Even this was of rare occurrence, for Juliet was often so exhausted with her exertions of different kinds, that she seemed to have little power left for writing, and Matilda was so incessantly under the direction of others that she scarcely ever had a minute she could call her own.

As regarded Matilda's studies and accomplishments, she could neither pursue the one, nor cultivate the other. Reading, such as it was, served in some measure to supply the place of study, but her musical powers were suffering much from want of exercise. An unexpected change in respect to music accidentally took place after about a year's residence at Mrs. Burke's. Matilda, after a day of unusual exertion on her part to enliven and amuse the invalid, was sitting at the twilight hour listening to the same history of sufferings, real and imaginary, that had greeted her ears almost hourly since her first arrival, when Mrs. Burke said abruptly,—

"I think, Miss Lonsdale, you are about the dullest person that could possibly enter a house. How different it would have been if I could have got Miss Parrott, from Z——, to have been my companion; she would have been obliging, she would have striven to entertain me, she would have sung or played to me. I suppose you cannot sing nor play, Miss Lonsdale?"

"I attempt both sometimes," said Matilda.

"Then why did you not say so before?"

"I believed," replied Matilda, "that no one here was particularly fond of music."

"You are right for once," cried Miss Burke; "I hate it, and so does my brother."

"The Burkes," said the master of the house, "for generations back never loved music much, I believe; they were not given to harmony, eh! Lizzie? but that is no reason why my old woman, who used to be a great performer in her day, should not have a little entertainment in that way if she likes it."

"Sing something, Miss Lonsdale, do," said Mrs. Burke, fretfully.

Matilda reflected for a moment, and ran over in her mind her various songs with a view to fixing on one that might be likely to please Mrs. Burke, and at the same time cause the least amount of dissatisfaction to her other hearers. She seemed to think that, on the result arising from this trial of her vocal powers would depend whether or no so great a boon as the practice of music would be permitted her or not.

With some little trepidation, which the invalid attributed to the young lady's singing before so good a musician as herself, Matilda made choice of a ballad, the music of which was sweet, and the poetry good. Matilda's articulation was perfectly distinct, and the words interested the brother and sister, while the rich and cultivated tones of her fine voice made their way to the really musical ear of Mrs. Burke.

The consequence of this song was, that a pianoforte was provided, and a considerable portion of Matilda's time was for the future devoted to singing and playing to the invalid lady. Mrs. Burke had all Handel's works, and it was an unfailing source of pleasure to the young musician to ransack these treasure. Matilda had hitherto had but little acquaintance with the sublime compositions of this unrivalled master, and very often she did not give the character or the expression to the music which Mrs. Burke had been accustomed to, and the lady, well pleased with Matilda's voice and her docility, would forget all her ailments, and stand by directing and controlling the musical performance. By degrees Matilda persuaded

Mrs Burke to resume her music, and by this means lessen the *ennui* of many of her days.

It afforded Matilda genuine satisfaction when she found she had achieved this object; for she often had reflected that it would greatly lessen the irksomeness of her own situation if she thought that she in any important point benefited her fellow-creatures. As to the routine of her daily duty, she felt that another might perform it as well. The well-chosen words of some of the oratorios led to further search into the Holy Scriptures, and Matilda after a time asked and obtained permission to read daily in the Bible to the invalid.

Mrs. Burke's health began to improve, and her temper also; occupation and the reflection induced by listening to the Holy Scriptures gave a check to incessant complaint and irritation, and the invalid's life now afforded her some enjoyment.

Mr. Burke hailed the change with considerable satisfaction, and attributed it to its right cause, namely, the influence which Matilda had gained over his wife.

Mr. Burke was a man of considerable property in the neighbourhood, and his judgment, when it could be arrived at through his queer temper, was valuable; he was largely concerned in the railroad, and on him chiefly devolved the appointing a solicitor, when one was required in the management of the affairs. The second summer of Matilda's residence in the family, Mr. Burke was making frequent complaints of the man of law he employed, and he also loudly blamed the conduct of Sharp, the man who supplanted Mr. Lonsdale in his business, and with whom he had some little transactions.

"Do you ever hear anything of that scamp of a fellow, your father?" said Mr. Burke one day to Matilda, when he chanced for a few minutes to be alone with her.

"Oh do not speak so of my father!" exclaimed

Matilda, with heightened complexion, and the tears starting to her eyes.

"Why, the man ran away from his business and family, did he not?" replied Mr. Burke.

Matilda, who had often wished to speak to Mr. Burke about her father, but had not hitherto done so, either from want of opportunity, or from not having the courage to mention the subject, now took occasion to ask his opinion as to whether he thought it would be possible to find out where her father was, if indeed he was alive. She then told him all the particulars respecting Mr. Lonsdale, with which the reader is acquainted.

"Not so bad a fellow, after all," said Mr. Burke, when Matilda had finished her little history. "Upset it seems by the strength of his affections—felt the loss of his wife too much—rather strange to me that; and yet," continued he, earnestly looking at the tender-hearted girl before him, "I think I, too, am capable of strong attachment—I feel at this moment I could do anything for a daughter if I had one like you. You are a thorough good girl, Matilda; and if I could get hold of your father, I would for your sake give him all our own law business; and put, or I am much mistaken, that of most of the neighbourhood into his hands."

At the end of the midsummer holidays Juliet resumed her teaching, and evinced considerably more patience. Reflection and frequent conversation with Mrs. Rushton had shown her the necessity of controlling her irritable feelings, and she now taught with more advantage both to herself and her pupils. But her instructions came to an unexpected termination; a violent cold that she caught at the beginning of the winter, was followed by hoarseness and a cough, that entirely prevented her singing. She hoped, and so did Miss Wright, that resting her voice would recruit it, and that she should soon be able to resume her duties; but the Christmas vacation came and passed, and still Juliet could not sing. In the mean time the

young girl made herself useful in a variety of ways, and such was her desire to give satisfaction, and so good was her general conduct, that she quite won Miss Wright's regard, and finally obtained her entire confidence. Juliet had at last the happiness of having her statements credited, and the pleasure of hearing Miss Wright say, that for the future she should place implicit reliance on her simplest assertion.

Just before the commencement of the summer holidays, Matilda was surprised by a visit from Mr. Knight. A visiter to her was a thing unheard of before, and she hastened to ascertain the cause of so remarkable an event. Matilda met her kind friend with much pleasure, but her joy was quickly changed into sorrow by the news he brought.

It appeared that the cold which Juliet had caught had been followed by diminution of strength, which kept gradually increasing, till at last it became painful to her to go upstairs, and any extra exertion was attended by shortness of breath, and other distressing symptoms. For a long while she concealed, or made light of her illness, wishing to do her duty, and full well knowing that her bread depended on her retaining her situation.

But at last it became impossible for her to go on any longer as she had done, and Miss Wright, who had often kindly desired her not to do too much, now interfered to put an entire stop to all exertion on her part. Mr. Knight, who had been called in to attend the poor girl, advised her being removed from the school to some place where she could be kept entirely quiet, and put under the care of some one who would be able to devote exclusive attention to her.

The consequence of Mr. Knight's news was, that Matilda left her situation at Mr. Burke's, engaged the two rooms at Riverton she had previously occupied, and Juliet was brought there to be nursed, and, if possible, restored to health.

The meeting of the sisters, under such distressing

circumstances, was very painful. Matilda was greatly shocked and grieved at Juliet's appearance; and a thousand fears for her future safety took possession of her mind; and though anxious to control her emotions before her sister, tears and sobs checked her utterance. Juliet, in her reduced state, was much affected; but she sooner rallied, and declared, as she feebly returned Matilda's embrace, that the sight of her had done her so much good, she should quickly recover.

But Juliet's was a very precarious state; indeed, her recovery seemed much less probable than that she would eventually sink under her disorder.

Matilda attended her sister with the most assiduous love and care, watching over her by night, and never quitting her during the day, except when she went out to provide necessaries and little comforts for her.

Matilda was skilful in preparing a diet which might tempt the capricious appetite of a sick person, and she often denied herself necessaries that she might have the means of increasing the comfort of her suffering sister.

If Matilda could have foreseen the calls she would have for money, in having again to take apartments, and other attendant expenses, she would have hoarded her small gains with greater scrupulousness. It is certain that she had expended the smallest amount possible on herself; but all that she could spare after paying Ann Kate's little stipend, was forwarded to the Riverton tradesmen in small instalments, to defray the debts Miss Pringle had incurred in the name of Miss Lonsdale. Fortunately, it so happened that Matilda had by her at the present time a quarter's salary, and some trifling savings which had not yet been disposed of. Juliet, too, had her half-year's salary untouched; for Miss Wright paid her on leaving the school, there only being a few days before it would become due. Miss Wright, who was a kind-hearted woman, also insisted on Juliet's accepting of a small sum in addition, saying that her services fully entitled

her to somewhat better pay than had been originally agreed upon.

Notwithstanding this small store of money in hand, Matilda was fully impressed with the necessity of strict attention to economy.

As soon as poor Juliet was settled in the apartments, with as much comfort as could be contrived for her, Matilda sent for Kate, as her presence would be a consolation to her; besides which, she knew that the little girl would be of use.

Kate, though grieved at Juliet's illness, was delighted to be once again with her sisters; at the same time she felt a good deal at leaving her kind old friend, Mrs. Rushton, who had paid her every attention in her power, and who had become greatly attached to the amiable child.

At the end of the summer, Rupert too joined his sisters. A fever had broken out among the boys at his school, and they were all dispersed to their homes. Knowing how Matilda was circumstanced, Mr. and Mrs. Stirling would have kept the boy with them, but Alfred Bower and one of his sisters were so ill, that their parents took them off to the sea-side.

Rupert's society was very pleasant to Matilda, at the same time she regretted the interruption to his studies that his leaving school occasioned.

Two or three months passed, and no change for the better took place in Juliet's complaint. She did not suffer much pain, but her strength seemed nearly exhausted, and she was wasted almost to a skeleton. She was patient under her suffering; but it was most melancholy to see her thus declining. Matilda was nearly heart-broken; and much as she had ever loved her sister, the dread of losing her seemed to increase her affection fourfold. Everything that the tenderest love and the most watchful care could suggest, Matilda did; but much she feared all was in vain.

This was the bitterest of all Matilda's trials.

Juliet seemed quite resigned to her fate, and de-

lighted, when her strength allowed of it, to talk of a happier existence in a future state; at the same time, she said if it should please God to raise her up from her bed of sickness, she would strive more than ever to love and serve Him, and endeavour to become a wiser and better girl; and she would often add, with a feeble attempt at a smile, that she thought that such an illness as hers would prove an effectual remedy for her giddy and thoughtless habits.

She would frequently too express the gratitude she felt to Matilda for all her tender care and watchful love, and say that she never could repay her for her goodness.

At length, when hope itself had almost died away, Juliet's disorder took a favourable turn, and she began to amend. Matilda's joy was unbounded, and she feared she could not sufficiently evince her gratitude to Almighty God for his infinite mercy in having hearkened to her prayers, and preserved the life of her beloved sister.

It was a happy day among the young Lonsdales when Juliet first quitted her sick chamber, and joined them in the little sitting-room. All were most desirous to please her, to do something for her, and to mark in some way or other the delight they felt at her recovery from so severe an illness. Mrs. Rushton exerted herself to walk as far as Riverton that day, to welcome her dear Miss Juliet on first leaving her room; and she remained with her young friends till the evening; and never perhaps had all the party enjoyed a day of more sincere pleasure than the present.

Juliet's improvement in health, though decided, was slow, and it was long before she could think of looking out for some situation or other, from which to derive a maintenance; neither was she in a state to dispense with the attendance of her sister. In the mean time the little store of money was fast diminishing, and Matilda began to fear that it could not pos-

sibly hold out much longer. Juliet was still so weak, that nourishing food was most desirable for her; and it was a constant source of anxiety to Matilda, the difficulty of procuring it. She would fain, too, have concealed from her sister the low state of the finances, but Juliet presently began to divine the state of things, and positively refused to partake of anything which was not shared by her sisters and brother, and playfully said it would bring back her illness if she did not fare alike with them in their frugal repasts.

At the commencement of Juliet's illness, several friends had sent her jellies and other nutritious delicacies, but she was unable to partake of them; and now almost every one was away from Riverton at the seaside, or on some autumnal excursion. Still Juliet's health continued to mend, and by the latter end of autumn she declared herself to be sufficiently convalescent to undertake some situation where she could maintain herself.

Matilda was full of anxiety and sorrow on account of her sister, dreading that a ruturn to active employment would bring back her illness; but, alas! there was no alternative—the money could hold out but very little longer. Both sisters must do something or other to gain a livelihood for themselves and for Kate. Happily, as regarded Rupert, the Stirlings were about to return and reassemble their pupils, and young Lonsdale was invited to go back to school in a few days.

Miss Wright was applied to, to receive Juliet back; but, unfortunately, the situation of singing-mistress was filled by some one else. The good schoolmistress, however, knowing the necessity of the case, kindly said that the young lady had conducted herself so well, and had made herself so useful in the establishment, that though not particularly wanted just then, she was welcome to return, and remain till something advantageous might offer, or some change in Miss Wright's arrangements might make her desirous of retaining Juliet constantly with her.

A similar fortunate result did not attend Matilda's application to be received again as companion to Mrs. Burke; her place was supplied by the much-desired Miss Parrott, from Z——. Nothing but the direst necessity would have made Matilda seek to return to so painful and unprofitable a situation; but though she had advertised, and taken other steps to procure a livelihood, she had been wholly unsuccessful, and, as a last resource, she had solicited to be reinstated in her former office.

Mr. Burke happened to be by when Matilda presented herself before his lady to make her application, and he was so much struck with the dejection of the poor girl's countenance, on learning that her request could not be granted, that he promised to write to a relation of his in a distant county, who had a family of children, and inquire if they wanted a governess. Mr. Burke had a very high opinion of Matilda, and felt convinced that she would conscientiously discharge any duties with which she was intrusted, and he felt a strong desire to help her at a time when she stood so much in need of assistance.

Matilda was very grateful to Mr. Burke for his obliging offer, and agreed, according to his desire, to call in a week's time, and learn the result of his application to his relation.

Matilda passed an anxious week on many accounts, and she felt very dispirited when, on repairing to Mr. Burke's house, on the appointed day, she found the gentleman out, for she feared this foreboded no success. She had gone at a late hour, thinking he would then be returned from his customary walk or drive, and was greatly disappointed not to see him. Leaving a message to say she had called, she bent her steps homewards.

The evening was chilly, and the young party gathered round the fire, and the two elder girls began to discuss their future prospects. Matilda was full of anxiety concerning her sister, and she could not

shake off the dread she felt, lest the exertion to which Juliet would soon be exposed should bring back a return of her illness. She entreated her to be careful, and above all, not to expose herself to cold. Juliet was still so delicate that a great deal of caution was necessary to insure a perfect recovery.

On her side Juliet deeply sympathised with Matilda in the state of uncertainty in which her future prospects were involved. Go somewhere, or do something to obtain a maintenance, she must, for her money was all but gone.

Rupert, who had been listening to the conversation of his sisters, and entering warmly into the state of perplexity and distress in which his dearly loved Matilda was placed, exclaimed—

"How sad it is that papa never sends you any money, now."

"It is so long since we heard from him," said Juliet, "that I much fear he is dead, or has forgotten us."

"He has not forgotten us," said Matilda, warmly; "he would never forget his children."

"He certainly," replied Juliet, "appeared, by what he last wrote, to be entirely changed; all his former love for us seemed to be returned in full force."

"Religion," said Matilda, "has effected that change in him; he was once the kindest and best of fathers, and we should find him so now were we with him. Oh that I could once again behold his dear face! once more see him smiling on me, and hear him call me his good child! Do you remember him, Rupert and Kate?" continued she, turning to her brother and youngest sister, who were attentively listening to her.

"Perfectly, I do," said Rupert; "I remember how good-naturedly he used to mend my toys, make kites for me, and help me to fly them; and how he would play with me at ball, or battledore."

"And papa," said Kate, "used to take me on to the heath, after I had been ill, and hold me up to peep at the birds' nests in the hedges; and gather me the honeysuckles I could not reach; and then he would carry me in his arms when I was tired."

"And do you not remember, Kate," said Rupert, eagerly, "how papa used to take us one on each knee, and tell us stories?"

"And how we used to run to him the moment he came in," continued Kate, "and tell him he must begin another story, directly."

And the children continued to bring forward many instances of their father's love and kindness, in which tender reminiscences they were joined by their elder sisters, till a pause occurring in the conversation, Juliet said—

"Those were happy days, indeed, and it is pleasant to talk of them; but see how late it is grown; it is almost dark, and the shutter not shut."

"Let us talk on still," said Matilda, "a little longer; these are precious moments; we are all here now together; to-morrow we shall be dispersed. Kate will be gone back to Ann's; Rupert returned to school; you, dear Juliet, will be resuming your labours at Miss Wright's, and I shall be alone and—never mind what I shall be," continued she, suddenly checking herself—"I shall do very well, I do not doubt."

"I wonder," said Juliet, unheeding the latter part of Matilda's speech and, at the same time, raising her head from off her sister's shoulder, where it had been for some time reposing, "I wonder who that man can be staring in here so; he has been back and forward two or three times; see, here he comes again; and now, I declare, he is come in at the street door, and is positively entering our room."

"He had better mind what he is about," said Rupert, coming boldly forward; "let me speak to him, Matilda; stand behind me, Kate. What is the

meaning of this, sir?" continued the boy, addressing the stranger, who had advanced into the middle of the small apartment; "this is my sister's room, and do you walk out of it immediately."

But the stranger paid Rupert not the least attention; but resting his hands, as if for support, on the back of a chair, he stood earnestly gazing at Matilda. A flame of light springing up in the grate at the moment, revealed the countenance of the intruder.

"Is it possible," cried Matilda, "can it really be? Yes, it is; it is papa!" and in another moment she was folded in the arms of the stranger.

"My child, my own dear Matilda," exclaimed Mr. Lonsdale, for it was really he; "do I find you alive and well, and my Juliet, too; and my boy, and my little darling, Kate? Let me embrace you all, my children. Oh what happiness is this! what joyous moments! they make me amends for all I have suffered;" and, overcome with the force of his emotion, the deeply-agitated father sunk into a chair.

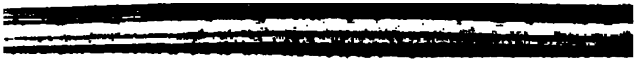
"They told me you were all dead!" continued he, making a strong effort to subdue the feelings that almost overpowered him.

"Oh papa! dearest papa!" exclaimed Matilda, throwing her arms round her father's neck, while tears of joy almost choked her utterance, "we feared it was you who were dead; but, thank God for His infinite goodness to us, here you are alive and returned to us;" and she embraced her father again and again, exclaiming, from time to time, "we have you back, you shall never leave us again."

"I will never leave you again, my children," exclaimed Mr. Lonsdale, again embracing all the young party in turn.

"Deeply have I repented my conduct;" then pausing a few moments, he added, in a low, solemn voice, "I look upon the year succeeding the death of my wife as a dark passage in my life that I would for ever blot from my remembrance. Without the sup-

Mr. Lonsdale's Return.—P. 342.



port and consolation of religion, the blow was too severe for me; it overpowered my reason. God, in His mercy alone, can pardon me. I trust in His goodness; I have confessed my misdeeds, and have deeply repented of them; and He, in pity, has vouchsafed to give me that peace of mind which man, in the pride of his heart, and the triumph of his reasoning powers, can never, unassisted by grace, hope to obtain."

Mutual explanations, frequently interrupted by bursts of joy from the young party, and heartfelt expressions of delight from Mr. Lonsdale, ensued.

It appeared that Mr. Lonsdale, finding that his business as a solicitor at Riverton had left him, determined upon going out to some of the gold regions, and being tolerably well provided with money and useful stores, he joined with others in a profitable speculation, by which he soon realized a tolerable sum. That he did not mention to his family his scheme of leaving England on a speculation of this kind, was owing to the eccentricity with which all his actions at the time were governed; but after the severe illness, of which he spoke to Matilda in one of his letters, and during which so happy a mental change took place, he wrote to his children and explained his views. He said it was his intention, as he was on the spot, to remain till he had accumulated sufficient money to enable him to return and purchase a business; or, should that keep him too long separated from his family, he would come over and bring them back with him. In the mean time he regularly wrote, giving instructions as to what he wished his children to do, and at the same time sending them remittances sufficient to defray all their expenses of living and education.

It unfortunately happened that, after a time, Mr. Lonsdale removed to a part of the country where there was no regular post, and he, with others, trusted for the conveyance of letters to men who were either dishonest, or who met with some untoward accident

(by no means an uncommon occurrence in those regions) on their way home, and by these means Matilda neither heard from her father, nor received the supplies of money he sent her. At last one of the men who had robbed Mr. Lonsdale, and feared a discovery, put a report in circulation that all his children were dead. Shocked as the unhappy father was at this report, there were circumstances attending it that made him doubt its entire truth, and he determined to return immediately to England, and inquire into the matter himself. Never hearing from his children certainly tended to inspire him with great dread; and it was with feelings of joy that it would be hard to describe, that, on his arrival at Riverton, he heard his children were alive; and he was so overcome with the transition from misery to intense happiness, that he was unable, after seeing them through the window of the house as he passed, immediately to present himself before them.

Matilda's share of the explanations was soon given; the only letter she received after Mr. Lonsdale's illness was not dated; but it was not equally soon that she could explain her hopes and fears during her father's absence, nor the overwhelming sense of joy which she experienced on his return.

After a time, Juliet, thinking the traveller would stand in need of some refreshment, set about making preparations for tea; and not willing to set him down to the usual home-fare of bread and water, she robbed the little remaining fund of a small silver coin, and sent Rupert for as much tea and sugar as he could procure in exchange; and while he was gone, she, with Kate, busied herself in making such little arrangements for the comfort of her father as were in her power.

But Matilda would not leave her father's side; clinging close to him, she held the hand that was thrown round her tight locked in hers, and with her

head nestled down on his bosom, she seemed lost in a dream of happiness.

"I have not money enough, my child," said Mr. Lonsdale, tenderly regarding her, "to enable me to remain in England; my idea is, that we must all go and colonize somewhere or other. Will you go with me, Matilda?"

"Will I go with you, papa!" exclaimed Matilda, starting up from her recumbent position; "where is the spot on earth that I would not follow you to?"

"Much as I wish it," said Mr. Lonsdale, "and much as I am sure we should all prefer remaining in our own happy land, I have not at present the means of settling here, and I must—"

What Mr. Lonsdale would have said further was interrupted by the sharp rap of a stick on the room door, which was almost immediately opened, and Mr. Burke walked in.

"Bad news," said he, shaking his head; "won't do, got a governess, sorry for—;" then catching sight of Mr. Lonsdale he stopped short, and exclaimed, "Heyday! who's this? A visiter? Did not know you had got company, or would have been more ceremonious."

"Do you not know him, Mr. Burke?" said Matilda, stepping forward, her face radiant with joy; "do you not know papa?"

"What, the runaway returned!" said Mr. Burke; "come home to your children at last, eh! A pretty life they have led since you have been gone."

"Oh do not blame him!" cried Matilda, pressing close to her father's side; "if you knew all, had heard all, you would praise instead of blaming him."

"Well," said Mr. Burke, smiling, "he will never want anyone to speak a good word for him while you are alive, young lady. But, seriously, sir," con-

tinued he, addressing Mr. Lonsdale, "have you any steady views?"

"It is my firm intention, with the blessing of God," replied Mr. Lonsdale, "to make my children all the amends in my power for having ever left them. The evils attendant on their unprotected state were aggravated by circumstances over which I had no control; but once again with them, I will never leave them; and all that the most devoted affection, the most zealous care can effect, to promote their happiness and interests, shall be done by me. It is my intention to remove with them to some colony, where, if I cannot give them all the worldly advantages I could wish, I can at any rate watch over them with a father's unremitting love and care."

"Off again!" exclaimed Mr. Burke; "now, why cannot you stay quietly at home?"

"Home," repeated Mr. Lonsdale, with somewhat of a sorrowful tone; "most gladly would I remain here, but I have not the means."

"Yes, you have," replied Mr. Burke, abruptly; "your daughter has taken care of your effects, your late house is vacant, and I, for Matilda's sake, will put business enough into your hands to give you a good income. Will you stop?"

Mr. Lonsdale looked as though he did not quite comprehend the advantageous prospects before him; but in a moment he pronounced the name of Sharp.

"We will soon send him off," said Mr. Burke, "if you will resume your situation here. All the gentlemen in the neighbourhood are determined to get rid of him. The railroad business, and other concerns, shall be yours; and a pretty thing a man may make of it, if he is attentive. A relation of mine wants me to set him up at Riverton, but I do not hold the man in esteem, and I do your daughter; I am well acquainted with her merits; Matilda is all a father

could wish; and for her sake—mind, for her sake—I will give you the preference over my cousin. Do you choose to stop? Give me your hand if you will."

For a few moments Mr. Lonsdale's emotions quite overcame him; the praise of his daughter, so delightful to a father's heart, and the suddenly finding himself about to be reinstated with his family in his home, with a prospect of a lucrative profession, were almost more than he could bear with composure; but seizing Mr. Burke's extended hand, and warmly pressing it, he expressed, in strong and manly terms, the delight and gratitude with which this generous offer inspired him.

"No thanks to me; no thanks to me," said Mr. Burke, hastily; "it is all Matilda's doing; thank her."

"I do," said Mr. Lonsdale, fervently, "I do thank her, and," continued he, pressing Matilda to his heart with one arm, while he raised the other towards heaven, "above all, I thank Him who inspired my child with a love of virtue, and who has preserved to me in her the inestimable treasure of a kind, forbearing, gentle, and loving daughter."

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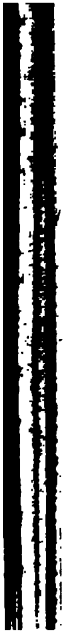

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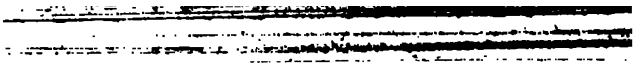

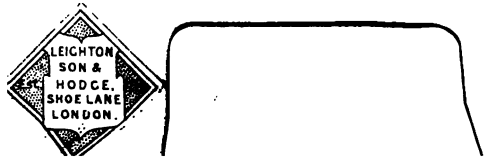
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